

PERSONAL CLUES IN  
SHAKESPEARE POEMS  
&  
SONNETS

Acc. No.	11353
Class No.	F. 3.
Book No.	458

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

SHAKESPEARE SONNETS AND  
EDWARD DE VERE

SHAKESPEARE HANDWRITING  
AND SPELLING

# Personal Clues in Shakespeare Poems & Sonnets

*by*

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HON. CANON OF CHELMSFORD

Beauty, truth, and rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity,  
Here enclosed in cinders lie.

To this urn let those repair  
That are either true or fair;  
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

THRENOS, *The Phoenix and Turtle.*

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD  
LONDON

Vol. No.	11353
Class No.	F. 3.
Book No.	

*First published in 1934*

*Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd., Bungay, Suffolk.*



## FOREWORD

THE most recent and authoritative compendium of Shakespearean research, *A Compendium to Shakespearean Studies*, frankly recognises how meagre and barren are the few known facts regarding the life and doings of William Shakspeare of Stratford. For interpretation of personality they are all but negligible. Apart from the bare records of his parentage, his christening on April 26, 1564, his early marriage, the birth of a daughter, Susanna, in 1583, and of twins Hamnet and Judith in February 1585, nothing is known of his boyhood, training, or early manhood, beyond trivial gossip and reasonable conjecture. The next seven years 1585-1592 remain a complete blank; how, when or why his connexion with the stage took place is equally uncertain. No particulars of his activities, in London or elsewhere, are forthcoming, prior to the formation of the Lord Chamberlain's Company in 1594, and his association with it as actor and shareholder. The first work to bear the name of William Shakespeare was the *Venus and Adonis* issued in April 1593, followed by the *Lucrece* in 1594, both dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton; and indeed none others ever bore the stamp of his personal authority or attestation.

The setting and surroundings of Elizabethan drama—the national outlook, the social background, the literary

antecedents and influences, the technical resources and limitations, under which the Shakespearean plays were produced—are set forth with admirable lucidity and restraint; and with still more delicate precision the problems of textual preservation and transmission, and the successive phases of Shakespearean criticism: but nowhere is there any attempt to connect these with the career or person of William Shakspeare himself. This is the outstanding lack in a volume which Shakespearean students will welcome with delight: to personal interpretation of either Plays or Poems it makes no contribution. All questions of authorship are laid under strict tabu. That the Sonnets are ‘veiled or unconscious biography’ is conceded at the outset, and later it is stated that ‘the truths therein expressed are frequently particular and extremely personal, the fruit of individual experience,’ but all attempts to apply them to biographical use are dismissed as idle ‘exercises of fancy.’ On the traditional and orthodox assumption that may be true; and it must seem presumptuous to challenge the pontifical pronouncements or silence of the Curia. But coupled with these it is significant to note the animus which declines even to mention the name or works of one who in the judgment of his contemporaries—poets, playwrights and critics—excelled all others in dramatic and poetic achievement, and yet veiled his merits under a screen of careful anonymity. Among later Elizabethans anonymous or pseudonymous authorship was an accepted vogue, and was indeed imposed upon the high-born as a canon of nobility, which at his peril none could venture to infringe. The Shakespearean Folio comprises a splendid output of

dramatic invention, which lacks authentic origination; while in Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, there is a titled author of surpassing merit, whose works have hitherto eluded the identification of posterity. Careful exploration of the trail discloses footprints that are unmistakable. Literary links make it impossible to dissociate the Sonnets from the *Venus and Adonis*, or the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* from authentic productions of Edward de Vere. Rightly understood, both Poems and Sonnets abound in convincing references to the Earl of Oxford's relations with the Earl of Southampton, and with other contemporary associates and episodes, and shed vivid lights upon his personal experiences and temperament. In this volume, after briefly summarising the Earl of Oxford's indisputable claims to literary attention and respect, I unravel so far as I can the clues which conclusively connect him as author of the Sonnets and the Poems with the works bearing the *nom de plume* of William Shakespeare.



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## NOTE

SHAKESPEARE SONNETS AND EDWARD DE VERE—In references to this volume I use the simple abbreviation G. H. RENDALL.

Similarly I use BEECHING, KNOX POOLER, TUCKER, ROBERTSON, to denote their several editions.

H. C. BEECHING, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Athenæum Press (1904).

C. KNOX POOLER, *Venus and Adonis, Lucrece*, etc. (1927 Edn.)

„ „ *The Sonnets* (1918).

T. G. TUCKER, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare* (1924).

J. M. ROBERTSON, *Problems of the Shakespeare Sonnets* (1926).



## CHAPTER I—PREFATORY

EDWARD DE VERE, 17TH EARL OF OXFORD

IN a previous volume I sketched the leading incidents in the life and career of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and dealt more particularly with the relations in which he stood to the intellectual and literary movements which are the crowning glory of the latter half of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Since attention was first called to them by Mr. Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*, and the full-length study of his doings and personality supplied by Ward's *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, there can be no excuse for belittling his claims to serious consideration, or for ignoring the place which he enjoyed in the esteem of contemporaries best qualified to judge. Yet in recent works, which, lightly or at large, deal with the authorship of the Shakespearean Plays and Poems, there is a growing disposition to repeat some outworn tag about the 'scape-grace spendthrift' or to dismiss with a derisive gibe the 'aristocratic decadent,' to whom none but misguided cranks can ascribe much or all of the Plays and Poems accredited to 'Shake-speare.' To dismiss claims unheard may be sound tactics; but such sallies merely trade on rooted prejudice, or upon ignorance that is no longer pardonable. Nor can reflections or aspersions upon personal character, the key-note

of much Victorian criticism, be any longer treated as an index of poetic quality or genius. The intellectual and spiritual expansion which bore fruit in the English Reformation, had its counterpart in the social and literary revolt, which exploited and imported the moral licence and abandon of the Italian Renaissance, and found its most unfettered expression in the phenomenal output of Elizabethan Drama. It needs but the most cursory acquaintance with the annals of the Elizabethan stage and the Elizabethan Court, to realise how alike in practice and profession the dramatist and the courtier bade open and often shrill defiance to the precepts and demands of Puritan morality; and the Shakespearean Plays themselves are the clearest proof of the Bohemian-Aristocratic-Plebeian milieu in which they had their birth. These complex strains combine remarkably in the person of Edward de Vere. And for any sane judgment or conclusions, some knowledge of his antecedents, traits and personality is indispensable.

From early boyhood he was inured to the habits of display which were an appanage of English nobility. His father's obsequies were celebrated on a scale of sumptuous magnificence at Castle Hedingham. No sooner were they complete than he took the road to London attended by 'Seven score horse all in black'; and at a later return, Stow records the retinue 'of four score gentlemen in a livery of Reading tawny, and chains of gold about their necks, before him; and one hundred tall yeomen in the like livery to follow him, without chains, but all having his cognisance of the Blue Boar embroidered on their left

shoulder.' The bluest blood of England flowed in his veins; it was from the cognisance of the De Veres that the epithet derived its currency. At fourteen he rode in the Queen's train to Cambridge, and was among those graced with an Honorary Degree; two years later he was the recipient of a like distinction from the sister University of Oxford. Heir to the most illustrious line of an order that was virtually defunct, birth laid upon him these insignia of pomp, which were but rudimentary survivals from a past *noblesse oblige*. Ancestral services and distinctions had become a bar to prospects or preferments, and left no vent for instincts of ambition, except in ostentation and extravagance.

At twelve years old he was deprived of parental guidance and control, and committed to a tutelage, against which he continually chafed. Restraints reacted in the form of wild or impetuous escapades, revealed in the Burleigh correspondence; among others, the incidents dramatised in the Gad's Hill episode of Henry IV are broadly autobiographical.

In person, he was somewhat slight in build and stature, —'a little fellow' Tom Nashe dubs him, in his gibing letter to Gabriel Harvey—but remarkable for poise and grace. A nimble fencer, skilled swordsman, and expert at the menage, he once and again carried off first honours at royal tilt or tourney; among Court dancers he was the most adroit and elegant. To all sensuous reactions of colour, sound, taste, smell, he was acutely sensitive. In music, he not only performed, but composed freely, in the fashionable forms of Elizabethan madrigal and dance; in

the Shrove-tide Masque presented at Court in 1579, he was author, producer and actor in the leading rôle. He introduced new perfumes, and the scented gloves which he presented to the Queen were her special pride. In dress he indulged in the costly exuberance, which the fashions of the Court encouraged, and became conspicuous for flamboyant tricks of style or costume, derived from France or Italy or Spain. It was a field for his Bohemian defiance of convention. His lavish eccentricities provoked the envy of rivals, the laughter of the multitude, and rich food for the Academic pasquinade of Gabriel Harvey, for which he quickly made amends by compliments no less inflated.

Such influences combined to foster the bombastic and hybristic vein of temperament, which did so much to embitter rivals, and to wreck his own chances of responsible preferment. He shared the fatal weakness—the self-centred egoism and passion for display—which brought the Elizabethan nobles to their doom. Like Sussex, Leicester, Essex, Sidney, or his own cousins, the fighting De Veres, he aspired to distinction in the field of war. In the spring of 1570 he took part in the punitive raid with which the Earl of Sussex chastised the Scotch adherents of the rebel Northern Earls. In 1574 he dashed across to Flanders to get first-hand experience of siege-operations and field strategy, but was at once peremptorily ordered home. Later in 1585, when the Queen had at last consented to the despatch of troops to Flushing, he received a command, but was at once superseded by his rivals Leicester and Sidney. The evidence seems clear that he shared, and even exaggerated the outstanding fault of these

Elizabethan venturers. Their view of war was medieval, not to say Spenserian. It was the arena for personal prowess. Of obedience or collective discipline they took small account, and were themselves incapable. They could head a charge, or lead a forlorn hope, and as buccaneers were incomparable. The destruction of the Armada, towards which Oxford himself contributed manned and captained the *Edward Bonaventura*, was a triumph of guerilla warfare transferred to the high seas. But Sir Richard Grenville and the *Revenge* were acclaimed as their ideal; and in concerted action their failures were humiliating.

In Oxford these defects seem to have reached their highest pitch: as a colleague he must have been always difficult, and often impracticable; built in the contumelious mould of a Coriolanus, or even a Timon, to whom isolation, to the length of self-immolation, was more tolerable than any abatement of pretensions. Generous and lavish to recipients of his favours, and treating them on terms of easy condescension, he was none the less sensitive to any fancied slight, quick to take offence, and jealous of the least suggestion of interference or criticism. In the conduct of a quarrel he was remorseless, incapable of generous advances or admissions that could heal a feud. In his dealings with his wife, his guardian, his relatives (the Howards and Arundels), and in more than one recorded anecdote, these traits are conspicuous. All point to a highly-strung, or even neurotic temperament, rich and versatile in gifts and in response, but at the mercy of violent conflicts of impulse and emotion. These contrasts are well summarised in Aikin's

*Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth*—‘His character presented an extraordinary union of haughtiness, violence and impetuosity of the feudal Baron, with many of the elegant propensities and mental accomplishments, which adorn the nobleman of a happier age.’ And still more in the authentic and arresting tribute <sup>1</sup> devoted to the memory of this ‘great and famous Earl of England’ by Chapman, his rival and contemporary.

I overtook, coming from Italy,  
In Germany, a great and famous Earl  
Of England, the most goodly-fashion'd man  
I ever saw; from head to foot in form  
Rare and most absolute; he had a face  
Like one of the most ancient honour'd Romans,  
From whence his noblest family was derived:  
He was beside of spirit passing great,  
Valiant, and learn'd, and liberal as the sun,  
Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects,  
Or of the discipline of public weals;  
And 'twas the Earl of Oxford; and being offer'd  
At that time, by Duke Cassimere, the view  
Of his right royal army then in field,  
Refused it, and no foot was moved, to stir  
Out of his own free fore-determined course:  
I, wondering at it, ask'd for it his reason,  
It being an offer so much for his honour.  
He, all acknowledging, said, 'twas not fit  
To take those honours that one cannot quit.  
*Re.* 'Twas answer'd like the man you have described.  
*Cl.* And yet he cast it only in the way,  
To stay and serve the world. Nor did it fit  
His own true estimate how much it weighed,  
For he despised it; and esteem'd it freer  
To keep his own way straight; and swore that he  
Had rather make away his whole estate

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, Act III, Sc. i.

In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would  
Be frozen up, stiff, like a Sir John Smith,  
His countryman, in common nobles' fashions;  
Affecting, as the end of noblesse were  
Those servile observations.

In this striking delineation, etched in with such severity and force of line, the central trait lies in the claim to self-determination at all costs. There lay the key-note of personality—and failure. In all relations of life, in the home and at Court, in spheres of policy and of administration, he rebelled against the codes of fashion and class, against the restraints of social custom and proprieties; Bohemian in attire, pursuits and choice of associates, wayward and libertine in sexual affections, there was no department in which he laid more claim to independence and freedom of action than in range of literary experiment and enterprise. And it is with this that we are here primarily concerned.

He stood at the confluence of the rival and conflicting currents—Academic, Humanist, Romantic, Euphuist, Dramatic—which are the glory of the Elizabethan Renaissance. He came into personal touch with the accepted leaders and representatives of every School, and without committing himself to any commanded the respect of all. Circumstances favoured the growth of cosmopolitan independence. The youthful degrees which he received from Cambridge (1564) and from Oxford (1566) were no more than ceremonial tributes to noble birth; but they brought him into early and living touch with Academic aims and models at Oxford, with the dramatic traditions based on Plautus and Terence, and in tragedy

on Seneca; at Cambridge also with the schools of formal Rhetoric, which at the time figured so largely in the Academic curriculum.

From thirteen to twenty his own training pursued a varied and exacting scheme of study, devised to give broad outlook and high standards of critical perception. In French, at thirteen, he could indite a creditable schoolboy letter<sup>1</sup>; later at Court, both in England and in France, he acquired colloquial freedom in its use; and among his early purchases may be noted a version of Plutarch's works in French. For Latin, still the solid foundation of Renaissance learning, he could not have been in better hands than those of Arthur Golding, his mother's brother, who throughout the period of his Wardship (1562-1570) acted as his devoted Tutor and mentor. Among those who gave an English dress to Latin poetry, Golding was the most assiduous and gifted pioneer. In 1565 he brought out his English version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Books I-IV, and the remaining eleven Books in 1569. It was the version utilised by Shakespeare. But his range was wide—in History (Roman and French), in Law, and in Theology, as well as Verse. He translated Cæsar's *Gallic War*, and in the following year 1564 dedicated to his pupil Justin's historical excerpts from Trogus Pompeius. Further, he imbued his pupil with interest in graver themes, the writings of Greek and Latin moralists—Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and others who followed in their suit. The first work edited on any considerable scale by the young Earl was his friend Sir Thos. Bedingfield's translation of *Cardanus Comfort*, drawn mainly from

<sup>1</sup> Facsimiled in Ward's *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*.



extracts from these sources. His foreword of commendation written from 'My new Country Muses at Wivenhoe,' is dignified and interesting, and still more so the prefatory poem, which teems with Shakespearean forecasts, and from which a characteristic stanza or two may be quoted.

The idle drone that labours not at all,  
 Sucks up the sweet of honey from the bee;<sup>1</sup>  
 Who worketh most to their share least doth fall,  
 With due desert reward will never be;

\* \* \* \* \*

So he that takes the pain to pen the book  
 Reaps not the gifts of goodly golden muse;  
 But those gain that, who on the work shall look,  
 And from the sour the sweet by skill doth choose;  
 For he that beats the bush the bird not gets,  
 But who sits still and holdeth fast the nets.<sup>2</sup>

The surest index to his proficiency in Latin is the preface which he contributed to Bartholomew Clarke's translation of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, composed with the ready flow and volume of Renaissance Latin. Later, in his *Musae Valdinenses*, Gabriel Harvey compliments him on his facility in Latin verse; but against the mechanical and imitative pedantries of the Academic School, preached and acclaimed by Gabriel Harvey, and advocated with more of scholarly refinement by Philip Sidney and his Areopagites, and more of erudition by Chapman and Ben Jonson, he resolutely set his face. They could only cripple the forms of English composition, and the expan-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lucr.* 836, 840.

<sup>2</sup> Several of the lines are reset in one of the pieces contributed by him to *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, and the last couplet is adapted in the October Eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*.

sion of English invention, along their lines of natural development. The contrasts between Sidney and Oxford are full of interest and instruction. Rivals in love, rivals in the lists and on the tennis court, rivals for Royal favours 'employments' and commands, they were not less antipathetic in their rivalries in verse and leanings in literature; in drama, for Sidney the high-road of promise lay in the Senecan declamations of *Gorboduc*,<sup>1</sup> while 'the mungrell tragedy-Comedie' 'that mingled Kings and Clownes' spelt the last word in literary decadence; while the Earl of Oxford cast in his lot with the Euphuist and the Romantic, and the Bohemian condescensions of the metropolitan and provincial stage.

Not till January 1575 did he escape from the tedious round of social routines, Court pageants and Royal Progresses, and secure the coveted permission to travel abroad. During a two months' stay at Paris, he received flattering attentions from the French King and Queen, and then, riding on with his cavalcade by way of Strasburg, was able before the end of April to cross the Alps and take up his abode in the valley of the Po. At Padua, Verona, Venice, and more cursorily at Genoa, Florence and Siena,<sup>2</sup> he plunged into the civic excitements and dissipations of post-Renascence Italy. Reckless expenditure brought him into the clutches of bankers and money-lenders, and did much to impoverish his home estates, but, for good and evil, Italian ways and culture left a lasting impress on his literary, social and ethical ideals.

<sup>1</sup> The joint production of Thos. Norton and Thos. Sackville (later Lord Buckhurst).

<sup>2</sup> Probably too at Rome, and even Sicily. Ward, pp. 106-112.

His return to England in 1576 coincided with a notable event in the history of English Drama, the opening of the *Theater*, the first licensed play-house in the metropolis, followed by that of the *Curtain* in 1577. They gave new scope and status to the pioneers of Elizabethan drama—Marlowe, Green, Peel, Kyd, and some at least of the early Shakespearean plays. Under the Licensing Act of 1572, every Company of Players was required to register under the ægis of 'some Baron of this Realm or other honourable Personage,' and this form of patronage received enthusiastic countenance from the Earl of Oxford. Until their amalgamation with other troupes as the Queen's Men, in 1583, under the auspices of the Lord Chamberlain, no Company was more in request—in the Capital, the Court, and the provinces—than 'Oxford's Men.' As patron, he was far from being a mere figure-head. It would seem, in fact, that the stage—in its various phases of Plays, Masques, Interludes or Variety entertainments—became his chief pre-occupation; and he inoculated it with the newest strains of literary invention, in the form of Euphuism and romantic fiction. After taking his M.A. degree at Oxford in 1575, John Lyly transferred his fortunes to London, and while engaged on *Euphues*, *The Anatomy of Wit*, occupied chambers in the Savoy, sublet or granted to him by the Earl of Oxford, to whom in 1580 he dedicated the sequel or second part of his work, entitled *Euphues and his England*. To eke out his slender earnings, Oxford engaged his services as Secretarial Manager of his actor troupes. What part Lyly took in the actual composition or adaptation of plays there

is nothing to prove, nor has any record survived of the actual plays produced. But flimsy as they were in content, Lyly's *Euphues*, his Romantic drama *Campaspe*, and his subsequent Masques, possessed certain qualities of style and wit and verbal repartee, that left a lasting impress on English prose, as shown by their copious imitation or reproduction in the earlier Shakespearean Comedies. Lyly's feather-headed vanity precluded close or lasting intimacy, but friendly co-operation persisted for years, and there is strong reason to believe that the best of the lyrical songs introduced in Lyly's Court Masques were supplied by Oxford's pen.<sup>1</sup>

In kindred fields of literature, and also for the supervision of boy-actors, he formed a closer and life-long alliance with that most versatile and prolific of writers, Anthony Munday. Again and again, in Plays, Ballads, Tractates and Romances Munday solicited and eulogised his patronage with dedicatory letters, poems, and heraldic conceits. He was in no less sympathetic rapport with the Classical Romanticists, who found a choragus in Sidney, and living utterance in Edmund Spenser. In 1580 the first-fruits of his Muse, *The Shepherdes Calender*, sounded new notes in English poetry. In the single (August) *Aeglogue* devoted to literary themes, the competing shepherds *Perigot* and *Willye* are identified, by unmistakable echoes from their published verse,<sup>2</sup> with his patron Sidney and the Earl of Oxford; and at the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 62, 98. For the evidence, see Looney, pp. 329-334, *E. de Vere, Poems*, pp. 46-59, and G. H. Rendall, pp. 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Rendall, p. 58.

close of the amœbean contest, the poet, personified as *Cuddie*, can only award equal honours to both. Ten years later *The Faerie Queene*, Books I-III, were issued in January 1590, and among the numerous Dedicatory Sonnets a place of high honour was accorded to the Earl of Oxford, who is addressed in these terms.

Receive most noble Lord in gentle gree,  
 The unripe fruit of an unready wit ;  
 Which by thy countenance doth crave to bee  
 Defended from foule Envies poisonous bit.  
 Which so to doe may thee right well besit,  
 Sith th'antique glory of thine auncestry  
 Under a shady vele is therein writ,  
 And eke thine own long living memory,  
 Succeeding them in true nobility :  
 And also for the love, which thou doest beare  
 To th'Heliconian ymps, and they to thee,  
 They unto thee, and thou to them most deare :  
 Deare as thou art unto thy selfe, so love  
 That loves and honours thee, as doth behove.

It would be interesting to know which of the knightly figures is designed to allegorise the Earl of Oxford. Sir Paridell seems the most plausible surmise, but in the absence of direct clues, Spenser's 'shadowy veils' too often remain impenetrable.<sup>1</sup> The latter portion of the sonnet is a tribute to the position already attained by the Earl in poetic achievement; in appreciation of poetic merit it goes beyond any of the accompanying Sonnets, including those to Lord Buckhurst and Sir Walter Raleigh.

A year later the volume of *Complaints* includes among other items *The Teares of the Muses*, written apparently

<sup>1</sup> P. Allen, in *Anne Cecil, Elizabeth and Oxford*, traces resemblances in Timias, and Scudamour.

in 1590 or 1591. In it Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, bewails the degradation of the Comic stage, on which ribald pens had replaced humorous mirth and polished wit with coarse and scurrilous buffoonery. The general features resemble those depicted by Greene in his *Repentance* (1591), or scourged by Stephen Gosson and his Puritan followers. But in particular the poet deploras the recent withdrawal of one whose genial wit had been an antiseptic to those inroads of decay.

He the man whom Nature selfe had made  
To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate,  
With kindly counter under Mimick shade,  
Our pleasant *Willy*, ah is dead of late  
With whom all joy and jolly merriment  
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen  
Large streams of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,  
Scorning the boldnes of such base-borne men,  
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe;  
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,  
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell.

Clearly the writer referred to was of gentle birth and breeding. The terms employed are hopelessly inapplicable to Sidney, who died at Zutphen in 1586. Still less are they reconcilable with anything known or surmised of William Shakspeare. It seems only natural to identify the *Willy* soubriquet with the Willye of *The Shepheardes Calender*,<sup>1</sup> and the words fit perfectly the

<sup>1</sup> I refer to the August Eclogue throughout; the identification of Willye and Thomalin in the March Eclogue is much more questionable.

circumstances of Oxford at the time. In 1589 he definitely withdrew from public life, and early in 1591 married Elizabeth Trentham and took up his abode at Stoke Newington.

Spenser, it will be remembered, writes with intimate personal knowledge of literary circles at Court. Under the existing conditions of the press, authors in the domains of poetry, romance and *belles lettres* depended almost entirely on the support and liberality of distinguished patrons, men of birth and means, in touch with the Universities or Law Schools—to whom the Queen herself extended marked personal favour and encouragement—Leicester, Sidney, Essex, Raleigh, Hatton and to some extent Burleigh, as leading and typical examples.<sup>1</sup> Among themselves, or their clients, they formed literary coteries and rivalries; and one result was to create something of a class or caste distinction between patrons and authors. It became a strict convention that a patron entering upon the field of literature should do so anonymously or under some form of pseudonym. Nowhere is this more explicitly stated than in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), written, it would appear, by Lord Lumley, himself a telling instance of the etiquette for which he gives full chapter and verse. ‘In her Maiesties time that now is (Queen Elizabeth) are sprong up an other crew of Courtly makers,<sup>2</sup> Noble men and Gentlemen of her Maiesties owne servauntes, who have written excel-

<sup>1</sup> The subject is systematically handled in *Shakespeare's England II*. 188 pp. The *Dedicatory Sonnets* appended to *The Faerie Queene* supply a fairly complete list.

<sup>2</sup> See note on next page.

lently well, as it would appear if their doings<sup>1</sup> could be found out and made publicke with the rest; of which number is first that noble Gentleman *Edward* Earle of Oxford, *Thomas* Lord of Bukhurst, when he was young, *Henry* Lord Paget, Sir *Philip* Sydney, Sir *Walter* Raleigh, Master *Edward* Dyer, Maister *Fulke* Greuell, *Gascon*, *Britton*, *Turberville* and a great many other learned Gentlemen,' whose various literary achievements he proceeds to appraise.

In literary criticism, a new genre of the Elizabethan period, *The Arte of Poesie* is the most thorough and comprehensive survey of contemporary poetry, but in appreciation of the Earl of Oxford it by no means stands alone. Next in completeness may be ranked William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), who, after enumerating Edwardes, Tusser, Churchyard, and other publicists, proceeds, 'I may not omitte the deserved commendations of many honourable and noble Lordes and Gentlemen in her Maiesties Courte, which in the rare devises of Poetry have beene and yet are most excellent skylfull, among whom the right honourable Earle of *Oxford* may challenge to himself the tytle of the most excellent among the rest.' And a little later in his list of Comedians—Greek, Latin and English—Francis Meres in his 1598 *Palladis Tamia* declares explicitly, 'So the best for Comedy amongst us bee Edward, Earle of Oxforde,' followed by other familiar

<sup>1</sup> In 'makers' and 'doings' he translates Greek ποιηταί and ποιήσεις. So, for instance, in I. viii, where he is equally emphatic about the preservation of anonymity by members of the nobility or gentry.



and leading names. Thus the sign-posts—and many more might be adduced—all point in the same direction; and in the face of their united testimonies, it is hardly too much to say that Spenser composing a lament for Thalia, Muse of Comedy, in 1590, could hardly do other than let the burden of her Complaint dwell on the Earl of Oxford. In his earlier Eclogue, Willy had been his pastoral designation, and here, true to the code of pastoral nomenclature, he adheres to the designation, which the initiated would understand. If ‘our pleasant *Willy*’ is not the Earl of Oxford, who is he? That is the crucial question to put—and reply, subject to cross-examination, will not be easy. No one can suppose that Spenser is referring to the few youthful poems, which in more or less sporadic fashion found their way into *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576) or later anthologies. These have interest and values of their own, but bear no relation to the Muse of Comedy: they are lyrical snatches, which belong, if at all, to the realm of Euterpe or Terpsichore; and no stretch of compliment could describe them as

‘Large streams of honnie and sweete Nectar.’

Thus Spenser takes his place among those who ascribe to the Earl of Oxford the palm in Comic Drama, and the Sonnets will reveal a return of generous appreciation (*Son.* § 106). The tributes of Lyly, of Gascoigne, or of Munday<sup>1</sup> in volume after volume of his earlier works, might be discounted as obsequious utterances of clients

<sup>1</sup> The Dedications may be read in Ward, *17th Earl*, pp. 200–202.

to a valued patron: but this had long ceased to apply in 1619, when, in his re-dedication of *Primaleon* to 'the heir, in whom old Lord Edward is still living,' Munday devotes almost the whole to recalling 'the matchless virtues of his honourable father,' . . . 'for whose sake rising from off his hearse in all humility,' he tenders his devoir to the inheritor of his renown.

Such, then, are the credentials attaching to the Earl of Oxford in 1593, the year in which the *Venus and Adonis* was issued under the name of William Shakespeare. And in presence of the cloud of witnesses, who include almost all to whom we owe contemporary appreciations of the Elizabethan drama, we are asked to believe that all vestiges of his dramatic or romantic work passed into immediate and complete oblivion, and that his memory deserves at most a passing and disdainful sneer. It is easy to fasten on flaws, or to bespatter with epithets so passionate and multiplex a personality as that of Edward de Vere; but at least the open-minded student of literature, in assessing his claims to Shakespearean honours, will approach the problem with the presuppositions, which I have here briefly summarised.

The Sonnets have been subjected to every kind of inquisition and valuation, most of them based upon the assumption that they are in whole, or in the main, the work of Wm. Shakspeare. Most of such judgments seize upon some element of truth, but make no attempt to co-ordinate it with other no less insistent claimants on appeal. As a result, critics turn their backs upon problems of origin, destination and occasion (which mean so much

for true interpretation), content themselves with subjective appreciation of the individual, and assign variety of note to random play of fancy or the bent of different minds, regardless of unity of content or inspiration. It will be well, therefore, for clearance of the issues and economy of argument, to state at the outset the main conclusions, positive and negative, at which we hope to arrive as regards the main Series, § 1-126, which I may denote as Series A.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Sonnets are not a conventional sequence, of epideictic verse, on the model of contemporary ventures, essayed by Sidney, Daniel, Drayton, Giles Fletcher, Barnes and others. Few only partake of this character; the large majority are personal in application. This does not preclude the inclusion of abstract or 'conceited' themes, or of topics such as form the staple of personal intercourse: instances of the kind explain, and excuse, not a few obvious flaws.

2. They are not *Poetic Exercises*—tuned for the public ear: still less are they a composite posy of 'Competitive Sonneteering.'

3. They are not from *Client* to *Patron*—designed to enlist his countenance or financial support.

4. They are not *vicarious*, or commissioned, verse; the rapports are all direct.

5. They are not *Dramatic*—'a feigned expression of personal feelings' and moods; still less a constructed scheme of invented plot.

6. They are not *Erotic*—for the ear of a Mistress,

<sup>1</sup> The supplemental Sonnets—Series B, § 127-54—stand on a different footing.

virtuous or otherwise; nowhere (except by way of warning) is there a tinge of sexual taint. One and all are addressed to a male friend.

Through and through, then, in our reading, they are personal—the product of a romantic attraction, or affinity, felt by an older man—schooled by the disciplines of experience—for the charm, promise and poetry of youth; registering the currents and the shoals of friendship in its flow, its ebb, and its resumption; a *Journal Intime*, which, with instinctive delicacy and restraint, voices the sensibilities and the reactions of a spirit finely-tuned in this department of emotional experience.

My previous volume, *Shakespeare Sonnets and Edward de Vere*, dealt largely with points of literary exegesis—the primary interest for lovers of the Sonnets; the present concentrates upon the personal clues in the Poems and the Sonnets (or indirectly in the Plays), which associate them conclusively with Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford.

## CHAPTER II—SONNETS § 1-17

### YOUTH AND MARRIAGE

To readers and lovers of Shakespeare, discussion of authorship is apt to seem fruitless and distasteful: they are content to read and, so far as their powers carry them, to interpret and enjoy. Even serious students often prefer to concentrate upon the dramatic, the psychological, or the poetic values of the text, without any reference to outlying problems of sources, interpolations, collaborations or original authorship. They accept the authorised version and the title-page at its face value: for us, they say, the Canon is enough; and even Apocrypha may be ignored. Remoter issues, even if they could be unravelled and determined, are of small concern; they serve only to distract and to disturb appreciation. The utterance and that alone is of final account; the experiences or the personality that went to frame it, matter little if at all. Every student of Homeric, and still more of Biblical literature, is familiar with the attitude; he may to a considerable extent sympathise; he admits that it does not preclude real insight and sensitive reaction to that which is most vital. Yet for himself it is impossible to separate the words, the text, the message, from the experiences and impulses which brought them into being. They create values, and often vitally affect interpretation.

Nowhere has this received more practical endorsement than in the field of Shakespearean research: every scrap and record has been sifted, every cranny explored, which could add a ray of illustration to the milieu and the material in which his genius found play. Justly enough, it was assumed that the gains would justify the cost: that is a risk which every explorer must be prepared to take. For concentration and for economy of effort the investigator does well to start from some clear hypothesis, and to subject it to every test at his command.

The first and obvious hypothesis, or one may say assumption, was that the title-name William Shakespeare indicated the Stratford player, with whom from the first it was associated. Research centred upon the story of his life and doings and individuality, but the results proved worse than disappointing. Nothing of moment has been added to the lean array of facts—parentage, christening, marriage, births and deaths of children, connexion with the stage, retirement, petty suits and dealings, will, and death, and to the smatterings of gossip which Rev. J. Ward, Aubrey or Rowe were able to collect a generation or two after his death.<sup>1</sup>

Research exhaustive and indefatigable has succeeded only in gleaning a small handful of negligible facts about business transactions with acquaintances or neighbours, not of an inspiring kind. It has yielded not a hint or suggestion that helps to elucidate poetic achievements, or

<sup>1</sup> Shortly summarised in Gilbert Standen, *Shakespeare Authorship*; Douglas, *Earl of Oxford as Shakespeare*.

to interpret the closing years of unproductive silence. The net result has been to multiply misgivings. There is not merely want of positive support, but discrepancies that seem fatal. The chronological implications conflict violently with the literary data supplied by the production of the Plays, early and late, by the publication of the Sonnets, and by that of the first Folio. Nothing tallies; and the Stratford surroundings disclose no trace of literary interest or associations, past or present. They reveal inexplicable contradictions, but no clues. In one direction only have these researches cleared the ground. Study of local history has extended the range of possibilities. Fuller knowledge of the social and educational resources of country-towns and schools, and of Stratford-on-Avon in particular, has enabled a sympathetic student such as Sharp to construct impressionist pictures of things that might have been, though not one of them receives explicit confirmation from the fragmentary notices or tales attaching to William Shakspeare. In actual fact the possibilities seldom if ever bore fruit, except through the medium of the Universities or the Church, or by virtue of privileged aristocratic position. The annals of Elizabethan literature may be searched in vain for any parallel approaching the developments ascribed to Shakespeare.

But here the blank upon the personal side has been utilised to build up a case for the defence. Stratford curricula, it is contended, included Latin Grammar, and at higher stages some acquaintance with writers such as Plautus and Ovid, and there is no real proof that William Shakspeare left school early—or indeed that he ever

attended it at all. He *may* have been well grounded in Latin, or even gained elementary knowledge of Greek. The argument from may-have-beens is carried even further. The Matriculation lists of Oxford are demonstrably guilty of gaps and omissions: residence at Oxford, or study at the Inns of Court, is not disproved by the mere argument from silence. Nay, further, the years assigned to stage apprenticeship in London allow of incidental tours upon the Continent, or even visits more or less prolonged to Italy. And London itself gave unrivalled openings for processes of self-education, and for contacts with high life.

But on what a mass of peradventures do these uncorroborated reconstructions and concessions rest! They are a house built on sand. There is nothing to justify them but inferences drawn from the works themselves, the Plays, the Poems, and the Sonnets. But here above all, to the reader of insight, the case breaks down. An ideal Shakespeare has to be created, divorced from actualities, and from all reasonable probabilities. Dramatic literature is from its nature the most baffling and precarious from which to reconstruct the author's personality; and the more truly dramatic the genius, the more elusive it becomes. For the dramatic gift implies—nay, is—the faculty of creating, fashioning, and re-presenting types of personality foreign to its own, of divining and sympathising with their psychological reactions, of realising and expressing the moods and emotions which result. There lies the soul of dramatic genius: and it is hard to disentangle the creative source from the imaginative power and product. Where the author's own views and senti-



ments and idiosyncrasies take command, he begins to fail in art. Of Marlowe, of Milton, of Byron, of Shelley, of Browning, of Bernard Shaw, it may always be felt that they themselves are there; visibly they pull the strings; beneath the robes or the rags, the flounces or the veils, of their heroes or their heroines, we catch not only their accent but their outlook: they are unmistakable. Their dramatic power is limited to types reflecting or akin to their own personality—a Samson Agonistes, a Cain, a Prometheus, a Paracelsus, as the case may be. Their limits are soon reached: interdependence of groups and characters, and accordant development of motives and situations, lie beyond their handling: it was a feat barely attempted by Greek or Roman dramatists.

If the creation and development of character is hard, still harder is the creation and maintenance of a social atmosphere, outside the range of personal experience, in which the characters may act and react in accordance with surroundings and assumptions to which they are inured. For the most gifted dramatist, realistic representation of an unfamiliar atmosphere imposes a strain beyond his powers: it fetters the freedom and naturalness of his dramatic instinct, of the psychological movement and flexibility essential to his art. For this reason, either he accepts the social conventions with which he is familiar, or he adopts an artificial code of stage conventions, which bear little or no relation to actual life. Both methods are freely exemplified in Shakespeare. And here, even more than in any details of parentage, training, book-learning, or travel, the case for a plebeian Shakespeare decisively breaks down.

By instinct, breeding and constitutional habit of mind he is through and through, in the proper and Elizabethan sense, a gentleman, and it would not be wrong to say an aristocrat. He moves habitually, as to the manner born, in the atmosphere of Courts, of noble ladies and men of high degree. Throughout the historic plays not the titles merely, but the plots and the dramatic interest centre about the persons of Kings and Queens, noblemen, dignitaries and officers of state. When Comic relief is introduced, it is usually through such characteristic appanages of high life as the Fool, the jester, or the page. And the female figures not less, in their gait and bearing, their attitude to suitors, their skill in raillery and repartee, their by-plays of intrigue, their relations with their maids-in-waiting and confidantes, bear the unmistakable stamp of high breeding and courtly ways, the note and tone which habit and experience alone are able to impart. Nor is this convention imposed by the historic drama. It is retained in the great tragedies, and so far as possible in the selection of Roman themes and types—Coriolanus, Julius Cæsar, and pre-eminently Antony and Cleopatra. And in embryo it is present in the earlier Comedies of Manners and intrigue, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the leading characters are all of noble birth.

It is of course true that types drawn from humble life are admitted to his drama, and may indeed be regarded as a characteristic innovation. But this does nothing to invalidate the argument, which perhaps finds here its strongest reinforcement. His peasants, craftsmen or

rogues mark the contrast between his own outlook and theirs. Their rôle is not the product of actual experience, but represents the standpoint of the sympathetic and amused observer: their humours, dispositions and ideas are for the entertainment of his wit. The village constable and watchmen, the schoolmaster or the parson, the valet, the porter or the gravedigger, are themes for twinkling mirth; and their unsophisticated crudities furnish the material for humour, which delights in the sense of contrast. The poet delights to pose them in some romantic or fantastic setting designed to give full value to the contrasts of effect. They impersonate the ironies of life, and thus so far from being merely farcical, or objects of burlesque, they become apt mouthpieces of the Comic Muse, in her criticism of the vanities of life, and take their place among the masterstrokes of dramatic delineation.

With the middle-class bourgeois of the country-town—traders and shopkeepers, clerks and artisans—Shakespeare shows a minimum of sympathy or understanding: they hardly figure on his stage; they contribute nothing to his criticism of life or manners, they have no power to interest or amuse. For his purposes they remained drab, featureless and commonplace, beings devoid of the superstitions or the simplicity, which give childlike freshness to the rustic or the savage, but who had not as yet developed the graces or the culture, which could make them on their own merits stimulating or attractive. This lies partly in the nature of things, in the dulness of the average: and may not be in itself conclusive. But it is strange if Shakespeare could find no material for drama,

the Tragic or the Comic Muse, in the foibles and the intercourse of the very class with which he was most intimate, and from which he is supposed to have been drawn.

But for revelation of personality, Poems and Sonnets offer more tractable material. In discussions of authorship the Sonnets have not yet received their due. Too often the Sonnets (like others of their kin) have been relegated to a kind of *temenos* or sacred enclosure of their own, in the realm of pure poetry. And a reticence, dictated at first by æsthetic scruples or reserves, has been prolonged into the more analytic and controversial era. Evidentially they have been shelved, as bringing no grist either to the Shakspearean or the Baconian mill. Neither in dedication, nor mode of issue, nor content, nor revelations of personality, is it easy, or in truth possible, to reconcile them with either authorship. Consequently they have been left to the lover of poetry and the exegete, who has been content to treat them as pure poetry, representing moods and situations, actual or dramatic, which call for no further examination, and belong to the realms of imagination, or of Art for Art's sake. Enough that they are part of the Canon, of the traditional Shakspearean fount. To individualise, to bring them into touch with actual life, to submit them to touchstones of biographical fact, is but to 'finger the ripe fruit's misty bloom,' and commit a kind of literary sacrilege.

It is true that there are Sonnets—some of the best, and some of the worst—in which the poet so generalises his emotion, or so toys with his fancy, that the personal element may be said to evaporate. That is true of all good

poetry. But on the strength of this to proceed to the broad affirmation that the Sonnets are not autobiographical, is to fly in the face of facts patent and irresistible. The ostriches of criticism may ignore them and bury their heads in the sand: or critics of perception may be content with æsthetic appreciation, and prefer not to distract enjoyment with problems which they dismiss as insoluble; but from end to end of the Sonnets we are again and again confronted with passages which no mere play of fancy or poetic invention can account for, and which are the outcome of actual, concrete and intimate personal experiences.

Close and careful study has brought me to the conviction that the casting vote, or rather I should say the conclusive key, in the determination of personality, rests with the Sonnets: and I believe that anyone who brings to the study the requisite literary appreciation (that is essential), and a moderately accurate acquaintance with the points at issue, will find himself gradually and irresistibly driven to the same conclusion. The index-pointers are so numerous, so delicate, so complete, so homogeneous, in the indications which they give, that they exclude the mere play of coincidence or chance. An esoteric unity such as the Sonnets, rightly apprehended, exhibit, becomes the most convincing of all proofs. For disciplined appreciation it is entitled to the courage of its convictions, and to outweigh even an impressive catena of external testimonies.

The Sonnets were first issued in 1609, a date—five years after the death of the Earl of Oxford, and seven before the death of William Shakspeare—which at first

sight seems devoid of significance. It will be found to yield important results, but meanwhile may serve as a useful *terminus ad quem*. That the Sonnets cover a certain range of years is stated categorically in § 104; three successive winters, springs and summers have intervened, since first the writer beheld and felt the impulse of his new inspiration. And this 'full three years' remains a fixed integer, whatever be the larger range assigned to the series as a whole;<sup>1</sup> and we shall find it corroborated by various lines of internal evidence. The opening Sonnets cannot be dissociated from the *Venus and Adonis* period of 1593, nor the following stratum from that of *Lucrece* (1594); and parallels from the Plays, though less determinate and reliable, conspire to corroborate these dates. Assuming then that the original order of composition has been preserved, Sonnets § 1-104 must belong to the years 1593-1596, and the remaining § 105-27 within the framework 1597-1609. That certain sonnets were in private circulation before 1598 we know from Meres' reference to 'Sugred sonnets among his private friends,' but there is no means of identifying these. Two of the second B series (§ 138 and § 144), in an amended form, were pirated for the 1599 issue of *The Passionate Pilgrim*; and it may perhaps be added that the phrase 'Our ever-living poet' in the 1609 Dedication tells strongly in favour of posthumous publication. We now proceed to particulars.

In the case of *Venus and Adonis*, not merely verbal parallelisms are conclusive for identity of authorship, but

<sup>1</sup> Full discussion is reserved till that point is reached, Chap. XII.

still stronger evidential weight attaches to the pleas and arguments common to both. They prove to demonstration that the opening sonnets and the allegoric poem are by the same hand, and deal with the same situation. They cannot be ascribed to poetic fancy or to dramatic invention;<sup>1</sup> for in themselves they are neither inspiring nor romantic; though they have been made the handle for choice and beautiful verse: but no poet would have gratuitously devised them for the exercise or inspiration of his Muse.

Sonnets § 1-16 are addressed to a young nobleman, in 'youth's proud livery' (§ 2. 3), standing on the threshold of manhood, accomplished, good-looking, 'the world's fresh ornament' (§ 1. 9), to whom the eyes and hearts of maidens turn with virtuous desire

For where is she so fair, whose unear'd womb  
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry? § 3. 5-6.  
Now stand you on the top of happy hours;  
And many maiden gardens yet unset,  
With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers.  
§ 16. 5-7.

From the first exordium

From fairest creatures we desire increase § 1. 1-4.

which sounds the note so abruptly, the opening sonnets (§ 1-17) press on him the duty of marriage, without more delay, in order that he may beget children (§ 1. 4, § 6. 7). It is a duty to himself (§ 1. 8-12, § 2. 5-14, § 3. 1-4, § 4, § 5. 11-14), to the line of which he is the heir and representative, and to the world (§ 3. 4). Sonnet § 3

<sup>1</sup> See later, on *V.A.*, Chap. III, pp. 52-4, 59.

may be quoted as most succinctly combining and harmonising these appeals.

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest,  
 Now is the time that face should form another ;  
 Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,  
 Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.  
 For where is she so fair whose unear'd womb  
 Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry ?  
 Or who is he so fond will be the tomb  
 Of his self-love, to stop posterity ?  
 Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee  
 Calls back the lovely April of her prime :  
 So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,  
 Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.  
     But if thou live remember'd not to be,  
     Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

He must no longer procrastinate. The charms of youth  
and beauty are not eterne.

Those hours that with gentle work did frame  
 The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,  
 Will play the tyrants to the very same,  
 And that unfair which fairly doth excel.      § 5. 1-4.

They are meant for the world's enrichment, to bring in interest upon account (§ 2. 9-11, § 6. 5-8), and that can only be realised by reproduction and transmission—

Whom Nature best endowed, she gave the more ;  
 Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish.  
    § 11. 11-12.

Let no self-love (§ 3. 8) or self-will (§ 6. 13) blind him to the call of duty, or restrict the exercise of natural desires (§ 1. 8). Nature's gifts and endowments are held in trust (§ 4. 1-3), for usufruct and right of bequest. It



is incumbent on the heir of a noble line to become likewise a progenitor

You had a father; let your son say so. § 13. 14.

Only through procreation of offspring can we defeat decay and death

And nothing gainst Time's scythe can make defence  
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

§ 12. 13-14.

It deserves passing notice how freely he uses terms of succession, entail, bequest, usury and money-dealings, to express his thoughts. These are no part of sonneteering convention, but draw their value from the circumstances of the writer and receiver. Instances occur in §§ 2. 11-12, 4. 3-4, 6. 5, 9. 12, 11. 12, 13. 5-6, and in other connexions in § 134. 10, etc.<sup>1</sup>

With the closing couplet of § 17

But were some child of yours alive that time,  
You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme

the marriage theme abruptly drops, and throughout the rest of the Sonnets no reference or hint of any such background occurs. Obviously the project had miscarried; and there could be no clearer evidence that the Sonnets are not the fruit of dramatic invention, but of the changing vicissitudes of actual life.

The internal evidence implies an interval between this first Section (Son. § 1-17) and those which follow. With Son. § 18 the circumstances and the personal note have undergone a change; and other sources, particularly

<sup>1</sup> See G. H. Rendall, pp. 101-2.

the Poems, will help to measure and to fill the gap. Before passing to these, let us gather up the data and implications so far supplied by the Sonnets. The person addressed was of high birth and breeding, sole heir to a noble line: his mother had been distinguished for her beauty, and the death of his father is clearly assumed in § 10. 8 and § 13. 9, as well in the more explicit

Dear my love, you know  
You had a father; let your son say so. § 13. 13-14.

He himself stood on the threshold of manhood, graced with good looks, accomplishments and rank, the desired of many, but himself reluctant to accept the match favoured and urged upon him by others. That he had not yet completed his twenty-first year and become master of his own fortunes, is the natural inference borne out by other indications. The only young nobleman of the period (1593), in whom these conditions meet, was the young Earl of Southampton, to whom the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* are dedicated. The age of the writer is no less clearly indicated. That he was not less than forty is the obvious implication of § 2. 1-2

When forty winters shall besiege *thy* brow  
And dig deep trenches in *thy* beauty's field

followed by 'thine own deep-sunken eyes' in l. 7. And consistently with this, as the Sonnets proceed, the signs of age show progressive advance, a point of value in establishing the preservation of the chronological order in the Sonnets as published. In § 3. 9-10 the reference to the mother's girlish beauty 'the lovely April of her prime,' to-day reflected in the recipient's youthful charm,

reads like a personal remembrance. Sonnet § 22 observes the just proportion of age: when, in years to come, your face first shows the prints of time, my own days will be drawing towards their close

When in thee time's furrows I behold,  
Then look I death my days should exiate. § 22. 3-4.

In § 37 the relative ages of author and recipient are figured in the simile of a 'decrepit father,' disabled by some spite of fortune, finding his delight and comfort in the powers of his active child doing the deeds of youth. In October 1593 the Earl of Southampton entered his twenty-first year, and in the following April the Earl of Oxford—already in broken health—turned forty-four, so that the simile tallies well with actual facts. In references to his own age or looks, the touch of self-conscious depreciation is habitual. It reappears in § 62. 9-10, which marks the growing ravages of advancing years

When my glass shows me myself indeed  
Bated and chopped with tanned antiquity,

which in the next Sonnet is expanded into

When hours have drain'd his blood<sup>1</sup> and fill'd his brow  
With lines and wrinkles. § 63. 3-4.

In § 71 we have premonitions of 'the surly sullen bell,' and in the next sonnet but one read

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie. § 73. 9-10.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase used goes far to confirm Malone's emendation 'Bated' for 'beated' in the preceding sonnet.

The shadows and symptoms of the end to which these melodies are tuned, become explicit in the next sonnet

When that fell arrest  
Without all bail shall carry me away.      § 74. 1-2.

In § 77. 6 and § 81. 2. 6-7 funeral notes recur, and the poetry takes its colour from premonitions of approaching death.

Like progress is apparent in the outward features of the friend addressed. The opening Sonnets depict the budding charm of one in whom

Youth and thou are of one date      § 22. 1.

or, as he puts it retrospectively,

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,  
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,  
Such seems your beauty still.      § 104. 1-3.

He emerges § 1. 9-10 (and compare the 'lovely April' of § 3. 10) as

the world's fresh ornament  
And only herald to the gaudy spring,

a young 'Adonis' (§ 53. 5), whose adolescent charm is irresistible to those who wooed his favours and attentions.

Where is she so fair whose unear'd womb  
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?      § 3. 5-6.

or again

Now stand you on the top of happy hours,  
And many maiden gardens, yet unset,  
With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers.  
§ 16. 5-7.

His ripening charms, with their touches of feminine delicacy and brilliance (§ 20),<sup>1</sup> lead on to the Sections which depict the years of wantonness (§ 33-6, 40-42), during which the notes of warning (§ 69, 70, 95, 96) become increasingly specific and direct, and form a fitting approach to Sonnet § 100. 9-10, written after an interval of more or less prolonged separation

Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey,  
If time have any wrinkle graven there

confirmed by the verdict which follows in § 104. 8

Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

Later, separated (as seems clear) by a considerable gap, and subsequent to the death of Queen Elizabeth commemorated in § 107, we read

Eternal love in love's fresh case  
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,  
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,  
But makes antiquity for aye his page. § 108. 9-12.

Where the 'inevitable wrinkles' mark the deepening lines of maturity.<sup>2</sup>

What striking testimony these undesigned coincidences bear to the preservation of the original order of writing,

<sup>1</sup> The features most individualised are the eyes (§ 1. 5, 5. 2, 9. 8, 14. 9, 17. 5, 20. 5, 24. 8, 83. 13, 93. 5, 104. 2), the brilliant complexion (§ 67, 68, 83, 99) so often inviting the 'rose' comparison (§ 54, 67, 95, 98. 10, 109. 14), and the flowing locks (§ 68, 99. 7), in which Southampton took especial pride, as shown in the Welbeck portrait. See G. H. Rendall, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> For portrait of Southampton as prisoner in the Tower, see Stopes, p. 252.

and how compelling an evidence to the Oxford-Southampton solution of the problem! All fit into their natural place; while attributed to William Shakspeare, nearing and completing his thirtieth year, they become dramatic figments accidentally cohering in a disordered whole—commissioned by different patrons, and designed for various destinations.

One detail deserves notice, the recurrent emphasis on April. Sonnets § 1, § 3 and again § 98 are thus associated with early spring, and in the retrospect of § 104 April is the specific month from which they took their start. Incidentally this suggests a link with the issue of the *Venus and Adonis*. The argument cannot be pressed, without regard to other clues; but it will, I believe, appear that many of the Sonnets (like § 73. 97. 98. 104. 107) take their cue from the season at which they were composed. This will not only be some assistance to chronology, but add touches of realism and humanity, and lift them above ruts of convention into contact with moving life.

Now the *Venus and Adonis*, with which these earlier Sonnets are so intimately linked, was avowedly dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton, who answers with singular completeness to the requirements of the Sonnets. Sole scion of an illustrious house, he had succeeded to the Earldom on his father's death in October 1581, and in 1593 was still a minor in his twentieth year. The perpetuation of the title and the family depended on his survival and the descendants to whom he might transmit it. At St. John's College, Cambridge (1585-9), and later at Gray's Inn, he had given proof of attainments

and accomplishments far beyond the common. From his mother he inherited the good looks which he was at pains to set off with every device of wealth and fashion. When in 1590 he made his debut at Court, and in 1592 rode in the Queen's train, there was for the moment none to compare with him in brilliance of appearance and promise, and among the younger nobility not one who satisfies the same conditions. Moreover, at this very time, before the years of tutelage ran out, his mother the young dowager Countess and Lord Burleigh, as Master of the Royal Wards, were pressing him to consummate a long-projected scheme of marriage with Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the Earl of Oxford. As a member of Lord Burleigh's household, he had known her for years; in age and rank she was eminently suitable, but she inspired him with no lover's passion, and as a young and amorous gallant he preferred freedom to any nuptial bond. This is the exact background implied by the Sonnets, natural enough in actual life, but not a theme for sonneteering parade, and indeed said to be without parallel amid the multitude of Sonnet sequences.

The situation raises acutely the challenge of authorship. For those who ascribe the Sonnets to Wm. Shakespeare, of Stratford, it is replete with difficulties. There is no evidence whatever of personal intercourse, still less of intimacy, between him and the young Earl; but even, assuming this, is it likely, is it possible, that a provincial actor would have presumed to volunteer advice upon so delicate a topic as the propriety and prudential advantages of an early marriage? It would have been a wanton

impertinence. Neither could he have adopted the tone and arguments of a man of forty, counselling a younger to take advantage of the first freshness of youth, to effect insurances against the wear and tear of mounting years. Wm. Shakspeare himself was not yet thirty in 1593; and most certainly had not known Mary Browne in the bloom of her bridal beauty, when she was espoused to the 2nd Earl of Southampton. As a counsel of despair, it has been suggested that these Sonnets were commissioned by the Countess, to influence her son! Commissioned verse, forsooth, the clue to Sonnet § 3, § 5 or § 7! But apart from the slight to poetry, is it likely that a mother would late in the day, as a last resort, fall back upon this expedient to overcome her son's reluctance? or that the poet would throw away his one opening for professional success, in commending the suit of the most eligible of high-born brides! Throughout, there is not a word about love, or the fruition of nuptial bliss; not so much as a reference to the lady's charms of person, or of disposition, or of wit; to birth, or to the sentiments of chivalry. Was ever a commissioned brief more faultily drawn? and this from the creator of Juliet, or Imogen! The truth is that it is extremely hard to conceive or invent any combination that would supply a plausible framework for these sonnets, reconciling the poetry with the prose—when, unexpectedly, a veritable *deus ex machina*, the Earl of Oxford appears upon the scene. Courtier, poet, man of affairs, and premier peer of the realm, none was more entitled by position and experience to second the desires of the Countess and Lord Burleigh, and to influence the young Earl towards



acquiescence. But over and above this the lady, for whom his suit and his affections were solicited, was the writer's own daughter; and the relations between them were of an unusual kind. Since the death of De Vere's first Countess, Lady Anne Cecil, in 1588, the three daughters had been entrusted to the guardianship of their grandfather, Lord Burleigh, and made their home with him; and the Earl's subsequent marriage with Elizabeth Trentham, in 1591, did nothing to bridge the gulf. The one direction in which evidence of personal interest in his daughters is forthcoming was in securing for them partners of suitable rank and means. Upon this background, everything falls into place: the Sonnets are exactly what befits the pen of Edward de Vere. With perfect sincerity he presses upon the young Earl an alliance, which he felt to be the best safeguard against youthful indiscretions and adventures, and which in his own and his daughter's interest he had much at heart. While romance is absent, or any incongruous tributes to his daughter's charms or virtues, the assurances of personal appreciation and turns of graceful compliment indulge poetic licence, but never transgress the bounds of self-respect. The main appeal turns upon the considerations that were of most account; not upon feigned praises or poetic conceits. The match proposed was for mutual benefit, and the one weight he could throw into the scale was the assurance of his own heartfelt desire and approval. And this welled up as a source of poetic inspiration, which finds parallel expression in *Venus and Adonis* 'first heir of his invention', and *Lucrece*.

### CHAPTER III—VENUS AND ADONIS

DATE AND DESTINATION—STRUCTURE AND AIM :  
POETIC AND ALLEGORICAL

LET us now turn to the *Venus and Adonis* itself.

For determination of authorship, no single touchstone perhaps is more efficacious. But the assumption of Shakspearean authorship has been a fatal bar to just appreciation and understanding of the poem itself and, apart from verbal exegesis, its connexion with the Sonnets has been left dark.

That the *Venus and Adonis* was published (and presumably composed) early in 1593, is one of the few fixed *data* in Shakspearean production. Wm. Shakspeare was then in his twenty-ninth year, associated (through the London stage) more or less directly with the Earl of Oxford, but as yet unknown, so far as evidence goes,<sup>1</sup> either as actor or play-writer.

The issue of *The Faerie Queene*, Books I–III, in 1590 marked a new literary departure, in the composition of descriptive and romantic poems, largely mythological or allegorical in type; and the *Venus and Adonis* tapestry described in *F.Q.* III. i. 34–8 clearly gave hints utilised

<sup>1</sup> The sole evidence turns upon the interpretation placed upon the '*Johannes Factotum* Shake-scene' passage in R. Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592).

REVENGE OF WRONG,                  *Fain would I sing . . .*  
                               *If care or skill could conquer . . .*  
   (Paradise D.D., 1576)  
                               *Love is a discord . . .*  
   (England's Parnassus)  
                               *If women could be fair . . .*  
   (Rawlinson MSS.)

*The trickling tears. . . . (Par. D.D., 1576)*

<sup>1</sup> All these poems may be found in Looney's *Poems of Edward de Vere*.

metrically Lodge's drumming Iambics have little kinship with the melodious beats of *Venus and Adonis*, or the Sonnets.

Treatment and motive present a still more damaging contrast. Lodge's poem is little more than a versified catalogue of unfortunate lovers, commemorated in classical mythology or medieval romance. The Venus and Adonis episode supplies three stanzas of padding in the prelude to the lovelorn lament of the Sea-god, and is followed by three of the same kind on the woes of Angelica abandoned by Medors. Quotation will best show how little of inspiration they contain or supply—

He that hath seene the sweete Arcadian boy  
 Wiping the purple from his forced wound  
 His pretie tears betokening his annoy  
 His sighes, his cries, his falling on the ground,  
 The Ecchoes ringing from the rocks his fall  
 The trees with tears reporting of his fall. . . .  
 \* \* \* \* \*

Her daintie hand addrest to dawne her deere,  
 Her roseall lip alied to his pale cheek,  
 Her sighes, and then her lookes and heauie cheere,  
 Her bitter threatens, and then her passions meeke;  
 How on his senseles corpes she lay a crying  
 As if the boy were then but new a dying.

There is no descriptive charm or originality, no graces of fancy or realistic visualisation of scene, no attempt at dramatic characterisation or play of motives, nor any suggestion of personal aim or application; except by way of warning, the author of *Venus and Adonis* had nothing to learn from Thomas Lodge.

Poetically, though not in mood or moral, the *Venus and Adonis* is far more close of kin to Marlowe's *Hero*

and *Leander*, and choice and treatment of theme may well have been suggested by Marlowe's lines

Venus in her naked glory strove  
To please the careless and disdainful eyes  
Of proud Adonis, that before her lies.

The debt is by no means limited to general traits, to the handling of rhythm and metre, to the construction of an entire poem out of the full-length delineation of an impressionist episode in love, but it extends to particulars of expression and argument, which imply direct and conscious borrowing. The poem, as conceived by Marlowe, was cut short by the poet's death in June 1593, and did not appear as a completed whole in print till 1598, but the two original Cantos (or *Sestiads*) have left their unmistakable imprint on both the *Venus and Adonis* and the earlier *Sonnets*. 'Rose-cheek'd Adonis' at the opening of the poem is as direct an acknowledgment of Marlowe's 'Rose-cheek'd Adonis' in *H.L.* i. 93, as the quotation introduced in *As You Like It* III. 5. 82.

Dead shepherd, now I find thy saw of might :  
' Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight ? ' . . .

The 'horse' episode and motive, introduced at the start (Stanza § 3) and elaborated throughout St. § 44-54, is taken direct from *H.L.* II. 141

For as a hot proud horse highly disdains  
To have his head controlled, but breaks the reins,  
Spits forth the ringled bit, and with his hoves  
Checks the submissive ground ; so he that loves,  
The more he is restrained, the worse he fares.

Details of wording are reproduced in

Rein his proud head to the saddle bow *V.A.* 24  
 The strong-neck'd steed, being tied unto a tree  
 Breaketh his rein. *V.A.* 262-3.  
 The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds  
 The iron bit he crushes 'tween his teeth  
 Controlling what he was controlled with. *V.A.* 267-70.

Among verbal debts and images, we may compare

with In night desire sees best of all *V.A.* 720.  
 Dark night is Cupid's day *H.L.* i. 191.  
 Rich jewels in the dark are soonest spied.  
*H.L.* ii. 241.  
 and 'thy mermaid's voice' *V.A.* 429.  
 with 'mermaid-like' *H.L.* ii. 315.  
 Remove your siege from my unyielding heart  
*V.A.* 423.

compared with

Defend the fort and keep the foeman out *H.L.* ii. 272.

followed immediately by the description of Hero's breast

For though the rising ivory mount he scal'd  
 Which is with azure circling lines empal'd *H.L.* ii. 273.

epitomised in *V.A.* 230 as

*Within the circuit of this ivory pale.*

So far as theme is concerned, the Sonnets offer far fewer openings for reproduction than the *Venus and Adonis*, but here too the pleadings, figures and illustrations of the *Hero and Leander* have a prominent place. The Narcissus reference in Sonnet § 1 'contracted to thine

own bright eyes' suggested by *H.L.* 74-5, is utilised in *V.A.* 161-2 and again in *Lucrece* 265. Sonnet § 8 on wedded love as 'the concord of well-tuned sounds' is built upon *H.L.* i. 229-30.

Like untun'd golden strings all women are,  
Which long time lie untouch'd, will harshly jar.

and the following

Lone women, like to empty houses, perish  
*H.L.* i. 240-2.

underlie Sonnet § 10. 7

Seeking that beautiful rooffe to ruinate  
Which to repaire should be thy chiefe desire.

Still more directly

*One is no number* ; maids are nothing then  
Without the sweet society of men *H.L.* i. 255-6.

is repeated in

Sings this to thee—Thou single wilt prove none §§ 8. 14.

and

Among a number one is reckon'd none. § 136. 8.

Similarly, Sonnet § 9, in its reprobation of virginity, derives both argument and language from *Hero and Leander* i. 262-4

Virginity albeit some highly prize it  
Compared with marriage, had you tried them both,  
Differs as much as wine and water doth

reiterated in

This idol, which you term virginity *H.L.* i. 269.

and

Abandon fruitless cold virginity *H.L.* i. 317.

incorporated in the fruitless chastity,

Love-lacking vestals and self-loving nuns

of *V.A.* 751-2. In the same sonnet § 9. 11-12 the metaphor and wording of *H.L.* i. 234-6

Then treasure is abus'd  
When misers keep it; being put to loan,  
In time it will return us two for one

reappear in

But beauty's waste hath in this world an end  
And, kept unused, the user so destroys it

and the parallel passages in Son. § 2, § 6, § 9, and § 10. In truth, these opening Sonnets are saturated with the Marlowe poem, and the parallelisms, hitherto little noticed, show how intimate were the relations of Shakespeare with Marlowe, and indirectly with Chapman, to whom before his early death Marlowe committed the completion of his unfinished poem.

These *Hero and Leander* links are of chronological importance. They make it impossible to refer the *Venus and Adonis* to an early stage of youthful composition. It cannot be placed long before Marlowe's death in June 1593. And the Dedication, unless we divorce it from the poem, tells the same story; in the spring of 1593 Southampton had not yet reached the age of twenty, and until 1590 had remained *in statu pupillari*.

*Venus and Adonis* has been treated as a juvenile work of an unfledged poet, preening his wings for flight, a precocious experiment by a novice in the art of poetry and of love. This has been principally due to the terms



of formal dedication, and to the assumption of authorship by Wm. Shakspeare. On that showing publication in the spring of 1593 means that the writer had not yet passed his thirtieth year, and it has been usual to impute an earlier date, or even to refer its composition to the time when Shakspeare first gained a foothold in London. Youth and inexperience have been pleaded to excuse or extenuate glaring flaws and defects in workmanship. A far sounder line of defence, alike on the artistic and interpretative side, refers those anomalies, which go to the very heart of the poem, and obey the conventions under which it is composed, to the allegorical aim of the writer. No previous (English) writer thought of treating the Venus and Adonis myth as subject for a full-length poem. Absence of movement, story and plot unsuit it for the purpose. On the other hand, for allusive and pictorial use, it had established vogue. The mythological setting complies with the spirit of the age. With its aid, methods devised for the Miracle or Mystery play found new variety and scope. Mythology replaced Scripture in the Academic diversions of the English Renascence, and in Court circles Queen Elizabeth's devotion to the Masque gave mythology a leading rôle in Court revels and entertainments. In the production of such pieces, as author and as actor, the Earl of Oxford took an active part.

The recorded titles, as well as surviving productions of Lyly and others, show how frequently these devices assumed a mythological dress. And no small part of the interest centred in the topical allusions, compliments and skits, for which the myth or masque gave ready openings. And in close step with these, poetry assumes the pastoral

or the mythologic garb. For raw material the *Venus and Adonis* turns to the common quarry of the period, the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. An English translation of the work, from the hand of Arthur Golding, dedicated to Lord Robert, Earl of Leicester, appeared in 1567, followed by a second edition (with many small changes and corrections) in 1575, and a third in 1584. Shakespeare's obligations to this version have become an agreed commonplace,<sup>1</sup> and in *Love's Labour's Lost*, commonly placed first among those of Meres' early (1598) list, Holofernes<sup>2</sup> the pedant says 'Ovidius Naso was the man: and why indeed Naso, but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention?' IV. ii. 128.

But in *Venus and Adonis* the noticeable trait is not verbal reproduction, to which Shakespeare is seldom partial, but the way in which the poem is saturated with reminiscences drawn from the *Metamorphoses* at large. Few details are drawn from the *Venus* episode—warnings against the chase of dangerous beasts, the birth of the purple flower from the blood of Adonis (*Metam.* x. 728–39), and the silver doves from the 'swans' of *Metam.* x. 708, 720, almost exhaust the list: while the main motifs and decorative elaborations of the poem—the

<sup>1</sup> See T. S. Baynes, *Shakespeare Studies* (1896), Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 98–128, for details. 'From Golding's translation of Ovid, Shakespeare contentedly takes many lines almost word for word' (J. Bailey, *Shakespeare*, p. 53) somewhat overstates the kind and amount of obligation.

<sup>2</sup> For probable caricature from Geo. Chapman, see Acheson, *Shak. Sonn. Story*, pp. 327–38; Robertson, *Shak. and Chapman*, 110 pp., and the Introduction to Cambridge Edition of *L.L.L.*

physical charms of Venus, the enticements to desire, the reluctance of Adonis, the descriptions of the boar—are combined from other sections of the work, the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus episode in Bk. IV, the Atalanta and Hippomenes of Book X, the hunting of the boar in Calydon Bk. VIII, and other passages. The dedicatory lines

Vilia miretur vulgus ; mihi flavus Apollo  
Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua

and other trimmings, are from Ovid, *Amores* I. xv. 35-6, with which (in 1587 or earlier) Marlowe had shocked and dazzled the literary public.

Ovid, and more particularly the *Metamorphoses*, was the poet's chap-book in mythology, familiar from end to end. And the point of interest is, that this was precisely the field with which A. Golding was preoccupied throughout the years 1562-9, during which as uncle and tutor he was directing the young Earl of Oxford's studies in Latin. Even his motto *Honi soit qui mal y pense*,<sup>1</sup> and his contention that esoteric reading of Pagan myths is a mode of edification, are to some extent vindicated by the methods pursued. The allegoric intention of the poem excuses some parts of its lubricity, and accounts for the most glaring faults of execution.

The Venus of the poem impersonates the sexual licence and abandon which, fostered not a little by the Queen's own manners, and passion for dress and masquerade, grew to such a head in the later stages of her reign. On the career of Southampton, as well as Oxford himself, it cast a baleful blight. To identify Venus with the Queen, as

<sup>1</sup> Placed under the crest in 1567 edition.

some recent writers propose, is an outrage, from the literary as well as the historical point of view, hardly less grotesque than identifying Oxford with the boar!

In scenery and setting—the landscape, the flora and the bird-life (lark, owl, dive-dapper and terms of falconry), the technique of horsemanship, the huntsman's halloo and horn, the baying of the boar, the coursing of the hare, are all deliberately recast in English terms and surroundings. The voices of the night are even likened to the calls of shrill-tongued tapsters (*l.* 849) in Venus' wakeful ear. These incongruities might pass under cover of the decorative canons allowed to Renascence verse, and in naturalising classical types are among the most attractive features of the poem. But the anomalies go far deeper, and affect the dramatic and psychological handling of the poem at points that are vital. It is impossible to discount them as accidental and gratuitous blemishes—or to eject them as interpolations.<sup>1</sup> Artistically, the poet himself apologises for them (*l.* 712–13, 770, 791–2, 841), but the purport of the allegory compelled their introduction. Commentators excuse them as aberrations of undisciplined and youthful taste. But they are not of that order of defect; not purple patches added for display, but on the contrary sophisticated insertions, to which naturalism and tradition are ruthlessly sacrificed. As the result, Venus is made as unattractive as Marlowe's Hero is

<sup>1</sup> Mr. H. T. S. Forrest, as the result of literary dissection, regards over thirty stanzas scattered about the poem as interpolated. Beginning with Stanzas §§ 1–9, and §§ 26–9, they will be found to contain almost all that have allegorical meaning and justification.

virginal and charming. There was nothing to account for these flaws, so long as the poem was regarded as 'a poetic exercise' in decorative mythology, or the trial flight of a young and unfledged dramatist. And they did not very seriously detract from the erotic glamour, which secured for the poem a brilliant success. But allegorical significance alone sheds light on their true value. The young Adonis is pictured as the model of ingenuous and bashful youth. His heart was in the exercise of manly sports

Hunting he loved, but love he laugh'd to scorn (*l.* 4).

For precocity (*l.* 409–20, 789, 811), and still more promiscuity, in sexual indulgence, he felt instinctive distaste. This reluctance of Adonis, 'frosty in desire,' of which the Ovidian version has no hint, runs through the poem with reiterated and insistent (*l.* 34, 49, 69, 75, 90, 182, etc.) emphasis. It is alien to the spirit of the myth and even of the poem itself; it has no poetic or decorative value, and must clearly be set down to allegorical intention.

His entrance on the scene is the immediate signal for 'sick-thoughted Venus' to prey upon the charms of adolescence. From first to last 'the ungodly goddess' is portrayed as the hardened and insatiate wanton, thirsting for raptures of the sexual embrace, and using every device and stimulant of the practised courtesan—the rain of kisses (*l.* 22, 47, 84, 96, 115, 117, 209, 480, 517–22, 606) and the coils of forced embraces—to overcome his coy reluctance. The theme is treated without trace of delicacy or reserve, and the love-passages of a single night are extended into a poem of more than a thousand lines.

But the richness and abundance of poetic imagery and conceits, with the luscious or naturalistic charm of the decorative adjuncts, make it a veritable *tour de force*.

For just appreciation of allegory values, prime importance attaches to details or digressions, which interrupt the story with reflections that seem irrelevant or incongruous: these differ in kind from descriptive passages, which add colour or emotional values of their own, though they may not contribute to interpretation; and which in Renaissance poetry occupy a foremost place. As so repeatedly in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, so too in the *Venus and Adonis*, we stumble upon glaring violations of mythologic or dramatic propriety, which can only be explained or excused by allegorical motive. The opening appeal, with which Venus attempts to decoy the embraces of Adonis, culminates with two Stanzas (§ 28-9), which might serve as head-piece to the opening Section of the Sonnets. They run

1. 163. Torches are made to light, jewels to wear,
164. Dainties to taste, fresh beauty for the use,
165. Herbs for their smell, and sappy plants, to bear;
166. Things *growing to themselves* are *growths abuse*;
167. Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty *breedeth* beauty;
168. Thou wast begot; to *get* it is thy duty.  
Upon the earth's *increase* why shouldst thou feed,
170. Unless the earth with *thy increase* be fed?
171. By law of nature thou art *bound to breed*,
172. That thine may live when *thou thyself art* dead;
173. And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive,
174. In that thy likeness is still left alive.

Here almost every phrase has its equivalent or expansion in the Sonnets, and it may be useful to collate the leading

parallels, as some index of the close and intimate relations, which connect them with the *V.A.* In *l.* 163 'jewels to wear' is a variant of

The treasure of thy lusty days. § 2. 6.

With *l.* 164 compare

*Sweets and beauties* do themselves forsake. § 12. 11.

Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy. § 8. 2.

With *l.* 165

Men as plants increase

Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease. § 15. 5-7.

*l.* 164 and *l.* 166-7 find verbal echoes in

Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse

The bounteous largess given thee to give?

§ 4. 5-6, cf. 6. 4-5.

How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use § 2. 9.

Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,

Which, used, lives the executor to be. § 4, 13-14.

Beauty's waste hath in the world an end,

And, kept unused, the user so destroys it. § 9, 11-12.

lines which have already found their counterpart in

Beauty within itself should not be wasted *V.A.* 130.

The rather bald *l.* 168

Thou wast begot; to *get* it is thy duty

is reproduced in

So thou

Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son § 7. 14.

and

You had a father; let your son say so. §§ 13, 14.

and §§ 10. 14, 11. 3. 14, 12. 14, all build on the same thought. 'The earth's increase' in *l.* 169-70 is echoed in

From fairest creatures we desire increase      § 1. 1.

and further in § 11. 5. While the last lines 1. 171-4 form the theme of §§ 2. 10-13, 3. 13-14, 4. 3. 5-6. 11-12, and appear in § 6. 11-12 in the form

Then what could death do, if thou shouldst depart  
Leaving thee living in posterity?

as also in §§ 9. 3. 6, and other passages already cited.

There could be no stronger vouchers for identity of authorship. And to these as a further combination link may be added the line from Oxford's Poem to Bedingfield

He pulls the flowers, he plucks but weeds

which reappears in *V.A.* 946 as

They bid thee crop a weed, thou pluck'st a flower.

After this prelude, full swing is given to the erotic motive, elaborated on Renaissance lines with amazing wealth of voluptuous appeal, enriched and diversified by the episode of the palfrey and the jennet (*l.* 258-396), and composed by one familiar with the mysteries of Horsemanship and the menage. This forms the body of the poem, and in its appeal to fashions of the day accounts for the chorus of admiration with which it was welcomed. Sexual craving, in its feminine reactions, is pictured in its most importunate and unabashed intensity, bent on attaining the satisfactions it desires. About the brilliance of execution there can be no question—it is sustained and dazzling, prolonged over 200 lines (*l.* 397-606); but as to the source of inspiration, judgments differ. Some



read in it the impassioned ardours of ungoverned youth; to others it is hard or glittering crystal, the *tour de force* of a consummate artificer of words. The *Venus and Adonis* must be judged as a product of art, not as an output of emotion. Sophisticated passages, such as Stanzas § 73-4 on the reactions of the several senses imitated or adapted from Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, might be condoned as belonging to the spirit of the age. But one consideration is decisive. The poem, written by a man, deals (trenchantly enough) with the passions of womanhood. Lasciviousness, not love, is the governing theme

That lends embracements unto every stranger. l. 790.

The passion throughout proceeds from Venus, and elicits no response

She's Love, she loves, and yet she is not lov'd l. 610.

and the sympathies of the writer, so far as they go, are with Adonis. The inspiration then is literary and artistic, Ovidian in strain, arising out of the desire for self-expression, designed to please and to receive the need of appreciative rapport. Throughout the handling is that of a hardened veteran, not a novice, in the lists of love. And the secondary intention is to convey, in allegoric form, suggestions of salutary caution and advice. This accounts, in great part, for the tedious prolongation of the poem. The word is Shakespeare's own.

Her song was tedious. . . . V.A. 841.

confirmed by Adonis

You fall again  
Into your idle over-handled theme V.A. 769-70.

After the erotic climax is reached (*l.* 564-6), descriptions of the boar (*l.* 613-42) and the illustrative episode of the hare hunt (*l.* 679-708), serve to eke out the poem, but in the conduct of the tale allegory resumes its sway; to our æsthetic confusion, Venus of all people assumes the rôle of moralist. The poet puts his apology in her own mouth—

Unlike myself thou hear'st me moralise  
 Applying this to that, and so to so;  
 For love can comment upon every woe. *l.* 712-4.

The address of Venus begins with somewhat strained conceits, which possess more critical than poetic interest.

Rich preys make true men thieves *l.* 724.

reappears in Sonnet § 48. 14

Truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

And *l.* 728

Cynthia . . . obscures her silver shine

shows a still more interesting coincidence with

Fair Cynthia's silver light <sup>1</sup>  
 As *thy eye-beams*, when their fresh rays have smote  
 The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows:  
 Nor *shines* the *silver moon* one half so bright. . . .

in Edward de Vere's poem '*What cunning can express*,' which in this very year (1593) found a place in the *Phoenix Nest*, and which in vocabulary (*e.g.* 'cunning,' 'favour,' 'Desire,' 'sunbeams,' 'eyne') and figures

<sup>1</sup> The same echoes repeat themselves in the Sonnet of *L.L.L.* IV. iii. 29.

(‘lily-rose-carnation’) is replete with Shakespearean diction and imagery. A little later Venus reverts to the ‘idle over-handled theme’ (l. 770), which disfigured her earlier address—the procreative urge and duty incumbent upon beauty to transmit itself—as an incentive to sexual response. The terms in which it is treated are virtually identical with the earlier Sonnets.

What is thy body but a *swallowing grave*  
 Seeming to *bury that posterity*  
 Which by the rights of time thou needs must have  
V.A. 757-9.

appears in the Sonnets as

Who is he so fond will be the tomb  
 Of his self-love, to stop posterity? § 3. 7-8.

and

Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,  
 Which, used, lives th'executor to be § 4. 13-14.

is closely akin to

Foul-cankering rust the hidden treasure frets,  
 But gold that's put to use more gold begets. V.A. 767-8.

Addressed to a lineal aristocrat—(by the Earl of Oxford to a prospective son-in-law)—the argument has worth; addressed by Venus to Adonis, the suggestion of an Adonis-Venus progeny is grotesque. Allegorically, it may pass; topically, it is ludicrous. Adonis dismisses her appeal with blunt disdain

Your treatise makes me like you worse and worse l. 774.

and passes on to his stirring eulogy of Love contrasted with Lust. (l. 799-804.) Here again such a line as

The text is old, the Orator too green

betrays the allusive character of the piece; and he breaks finally away from the temptress.

The desolation of the abandoned goddess is next described in terms little suitable to the context, but for determination of authorship decisive.

And now she beats her heart, whereat it groans,  
That all the neighbour caves, as seeming troubled,  
Make verbal repetition of her moans;  
Passion on passion deeply is redoubled:  
"Ay me" she cries, and twenty times "Woe, woe!"  
And twenty echoes twenty times crys O!<sup>1</sup> l. 829-34.

The words are an adaptation of a stanza in the *Vision of a Fair Maid, with Echo Verses*, preserved in the Rawlinson MS., over the name of *The Earle of Oxforde*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Crys O!" seems to me preferable to "cry so!" and to be confirmed by "the choir of echoes answers O!" in the next stanza. For the singular verb, compare *lies* l. 1128.

<sup>2</sup> In the Rawlinson MS. *Ann Vanevor's Eccho* is inserted as a caption, at the end of this stanza, immediately before the Echo lines. Dr. Grosart (*Fuller Worthies Lib. Miscellanies*, Vol. IV) had no clue to the meaning of the words, and (probably for that reason) they are not printed in Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*, p. 199, or in his edition of *Edward de Vere's Poems*, p. 2; but they turn out to be of first-rate importance as a clue. In 1581, the Earl of Oxford was committed to the Tower for a love-intrigue with Ann Vavasour, one of the Maids of Honour; and Chas. Arundel makes the most of his offence among the charges, with which he endeavoured to wreck the Earl's position at Court (in 1583) (*Fugger News Letters*). Further it appears that Ann Vavasour was niece to Sir Thos. Knyvet, whose sister Margaret had married Henry Vavasour of Copmanthorpe, Yorks. Thus, it was as champion of her honour, that Sir Thos. Knyvet engaged in the duel, in which the Earl received a serious and disabling wound. The Ann Vavasour background of the

The primary reference was to the Ann Vavasour liaison, which brought Oxford into trouble and disgrace in 1581. In the original 'the rocks,' here called 'the neighbour caves,' were in keeping with the setting, and the lines run—<sup>1</sup>

Three times, with her soft hand, full hard | on her left side she  
knocks,  
And sigh'd so sore as might have mov'd | some pity in the rocks  
From sighs and shedding amber tears | into sweet song she broke  
When thus the echo answered her | to every word she spoke :

In *V.A.* 836 'sings a woeful ditty' takes the place of 'into sweet song she broke.' Now there is no evidence, nor any reason to suppose, that these verses of the Earl of Oxford, *which survived only in MS.*, ever passed into print or general circulation; and they constitute conclusive proof that the *Venus and Adonis* came from the hand of Edward de Vere.<sup>2</sup> The only escape from this conclusion is to assume that in 1593 Wm. Shakspeare was on terms of intimacy with the Earl of Oxford, as well as of Southampton, had access to his private papers, and was permitted to utilise this passage in a poem published under the name of William Shakespeare, and dedicated to the Earl's prospective son-in-law, the Earl of Southampton. Is it reasonable, or possible, to credit such combinations?

After these lengthy interludes (*l.* 613–852) the new day breaks, and the story is resumed. Sunrise is described

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original gives natural fitness to the adaptation of the Poem to a Venus, who allegorises the love-liaisons of Court life.

<sup>1</sup> Looney, *Poems of E. de Vere*, pp. lxxiii–lxxiv, and p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See further on § 76, p. 144.

in a stanza (*l.* 853-8)<sup>1</sup> second to none in the whole poem, and some 300 lines are given to the baying of the boar, the death of Adonis, and the distress of Venus, elaborated in a series of curious and often strained conceits. Incidentally, the two similes, used to describe the revulsion felt by Venus at the discovery of the dead body of Adonis, have special literary interest:—

As falcons to the lure, away she flies      *l.* 1027.

recalls the E. de Vere Poems<sup>2</sup> on the fickleness of women

The haggard hawk with toil is made full tame  
and again

Unsettled still like haggards wild they range  
These gentle birds that fly from man to man.  
\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

We train them to our lure with subtle oath. . . .

with close parallels in *Othello* III. iii. 260, *Rom. Jul.* II. ii., *Much Ado* III. i., and other plays: while the homely simile from the snail (*l.* 1033-4)

As the *snail*, whose tender horns being hit,  
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain

<sup>1</sup> It is pertinent to notice the close parallels of expression in Sonnets § 7. 33 and 29. 11-12 :

The lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate  
and in the Trico Song in Lyly's *Campaspe*, produced in 1589

The lark so shrill and clear  
Now at heaven's gates she claps her wings  
The morn not waking till she sings.

which there is good reason to attribute to the hand of Edward de Vere. See p. 12 *n.*

<sup>2</sup> In Looney's edition, pp. 25, 37.

is one of the cumulative links, which associate *Venus* and the *Sonnets* with the composition of *Love's Labour's Lost*

Love's feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled shells.

*L.L.L.* IV. iii. 334.

Finally (*l.* 1135-64) Venus utters her 'prophecy' against the sorrows, miscarriages, and moral contradictions,

The sweet beginning but unsavoury end

with which all earth loves are beset; and burying in her bosom the flower, which sprang from her beloved's blood, takes flight to happier realms. Stanzas § 170 and § 180

For he being dead, with him is beauty slain  
and

True sweet beauty liv'd and died with him

find their counterpart in Son. § 10. 14, 14. 11-14 (§ 104. 14 and elsewhere)

That beauty still may live in thine or thee

As truth and beauty shall together thrive

\* \* \* \* \*

Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

In later Sonnets, chiefly in those of the next phase, it is easy to find verbal parallels to the *V.A.*, as in the 'Describe Adonis' of § 53, but the close correspondence of theme and argument is confined to the first section, and confirms similar correspondence in date.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare was not

<sup>1</sup> Parallelisms have been carefully collated by Mr. Fort, as well as by Dr. Isaac and Mr. Davis for the Alden Edition, and his results are tabulated in the *Review of English Studies*, Vol. ix. p. 33. Where it is essential to distinguish significant parallels from mere repetition of single words, no two enumerators will

hampered with copious or retentive verbal memory, which is more of a hindrance than a help to poetic expression: unrivalled freedom in choice and use and placing of words is no small part of his poetic gift.

One result of the comparative study of the Poems and Plays is to show that correspondences in phrase or figure point usually to chronological proximity. The Plays in which the Sonnets find most frequent echoes—*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*—all belong to the early Meres Group, while for later Sonnets the *Taming of the Shrew* and *Hamlet* must be taken into account. In *L.L.L.* parallelisms appear not only, or indeed chiefly, in the sonnets, which are such a marked feature of the Play (I. i. 161 vv., IV. ii. 110 vv., IV. iii. 27 vv. and 60 vv., V. ii. 341 vv. and 395 vv.), or the praise of 'Black Beauty' in IV. iii. 234 vv., but also in unusual words—'idolatry,' 'misprision,' 'world-without-end,' etc., in word-play and repartee such as

My lips are no common, though several they be,  
II. i. 225.

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arrive at identical results; but all alike agree in the main conclusions, namely—that the significant parallels in *V.A.* largely preponderate in Son. § 1-17 + § 131-52, and that those in *Lucrece* are most noticeable in Son. § 18-52 + § 131-52. Outside the limits named, the *V.A.* parallels are almost all of the verbal or metaphorical order; and two only, both of questionable weight, belong to the closing group of Sonnets § 107-26. By Mr. Fort's kindness I have checked all his details, and consider that no enumeration could be more fair or judicious.—For *V.A.* parallelisms, his figures are: 22 in Son. § 1-26, 12 in § 27-52 and § 127-52, 8 in § 53-104, and 2 in § 105-26, but the correspondences in the later groups are relatively slight.



echoed in § 137. 9-10 ;

To things of sale a seller's praise belongs IV. 3. 240.  
utilised in § 21. 14, and in IV. iii. 302 ;

From women's eyes this doctrine I derive  
recast as

But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive  
in § 14. 9.

The early Quarto of *L.L.L.*, published in 1598, with the name W. Shakespere on the title-page, is a 'Newly corrected and augmented' version, and there are strong grounds for assigning the original composition to the latter part of 1593, when the play was very probably acted at the house of the Earl of Southampton.<sup>1</sup> But we must not wander into fields from which alluring vistas open out in every direction.

In masque or myth one does not look for consistent allegory, but for intertwining threads of allusive reference: and it is not difficult to disentangle these from the conduct of the story. First, there is the broad and glaring contrast struck between lawful and illicit Love, epitomised in the last words of Adonis, as he wrenches himself from the toils of the temptress.

Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,  
But Lust's effect is tempest after sun ;  
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,  
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done ;  
Love surfeits not, Lust like a glutton dies ;  
Love is all truth, Lust full of forged lies. l. 799-804.

The fleshly love, personified in Venus, is exhibited in the naked and shameless overtures of uncontrolled desire,

<sup>1</sup> Camb. Ed., pp. 1, 126-8. Chambers, Sh. i. 331.

bent only on the gratification of passions that are ephemeral. After the raptures of a single night, Venus 'yokes her silver doves' (l. 1190) and retires to her island bower. Throughout, the guilt of incontinence is charged upon the enticements and designs of women, by whom the man against his better impulses is victimised. This vein of sentiment is common to the *De Vere* poems and the *Sonnets*, and finds its most vehement expression in those concerned with the dark lady. From beginning to end the young Adonis meets the overtures of Venus with instinctive repulsion and dislike: herein lay the bloom upon his adolescence, and an ingredient of his youthful charm. On the other hand, he is warned against the fatal tendencies of self-love, 'contracted to his own sweet eyes,' and the Narcissus doom (l. 161-2)<sup>1</sup> that awaits the man to whom

To grow unto himself was his desire. *V.A.* 1180.

In conveyance of morals, the poem ends on the inconsequent note sounded in the prophecy of Venus (l. 1135-64), which foretells the cruel contradictions, disasters and mortifications that lie in wait for all earthly loves, from the initial

Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend      l. 1136.

to the closing

They that love best their loves shall not enjoy

These stanzas have no visible connexion with the main plot, or the allegory: they are interpolated without

<sup>1</sup> Compare *Lucrece* 265 :

Had Narcissus seen her as she stood,  
Self-love had never drown'd him in the flood.      l. 1164.

explanation, and can only, I think, be read as the author's intimations of personal experience.

In the interests of higher criticism it has seemed well to submit the poem to searching analysis. For date, for destination, and for determination of authorship, it yields results that are decisive. Descriptively and decoratively, as a study of the nude, it was a brilliant success; allegorically, an artistic failure. Allegory was not a medium suited to the poet's analytic and dramatic genius. Drama unravels and exposes impulses which allegory prefers to clothe in figurative veils. In method and appeal Spenser and Shakespeare stand poles apart: and the poet was well-advised not to divert his forces into channels unsuited to his characteristic bent. But evidentially it is of cardinal importance, establishing the twofold bonds of authorship, based on (1) the inseparable unity of the *Venus and Adonis* and Series A of the Sonnets, and (2) conclusive links connecting the *V.A.* with authentic poems of Edward de Vere.

## CHAPTER IV—SONNETS § 18-20

FRIENDSHIP : AVOWAL AND INTERCHANGES—ETERNISING  
AND IDEALISING : ELIZABETHAN SONNETEERING—  
LOVE LANGUAGE

BETWEEN Son. § 18 and those which precede there is a palpable hiatus; the situation has changed, and also the relations between the writer and recipient. The marriage motive has once for all disappeared, and is never revived. And it seems a fair inference from the available evidence that, alike to promoters and principals, the abandonment of the projected match came as a relief.

On the side of the guardians, the Countess of Southampton, since the death of her husband in 1581, leaned much on the advice of her father, Lord Montague, whose influence with Lord Burleigh had been all in favour of the match. His death in Oct. 1592 left her single-handed, and for support she fell back on Sir Thos. Heneage, who as a trusted family friend was charged with the administration of her father's estate. Not many months later she was able to offer him her hand in marriage (May 1594). By 1593 she had done what she could to influence her son's choice, and further intervention was futile. He had become something of a spoiled darling in the entourage of the Court, and, with his vain and flighty sensibilities, was little likely to accept a mother's direction in his love

affairs. He was looking forward to complete emancipation on attaining his majority in October 1594. Lord Burleigh meanwhile must have long since come to doubt, whether he was the most desirable partner to whom to entrust the estate and happiness of his granddaughter; and the young Earl's rash adhesion to the leads and adventures of Essex must have quickened his apprehensions. Already in 1592 he had made overtures for a more advantageous *parti* in the young Earl of Northumberland; and later a still more promising alliance engaged his attention.

When we turn to those directly concerned, it must be remembered that Lady Elizabeth was a child of fourteen when the engagement was planned in her behalf, that for the next two years the prospective bridegroom refused to pledge his affections, that alternative suitors had been considered, and that it is by no means unlikely that in the round of Court gaieties her own eyes already turned towards Lord William Stanley, heir presumptive to the Earldom of Derby.

For the author himself one can say only that the personal relation has undergone a change which amounts to transformation, and that it is in telling correspondence with the change which differentiates the dedication of the *Venus and Adonis* from that of the *Lucrece*. The earlier Sonnets are couched in the language of compliment, of generous appreciation of gifts and graces set off with every advantage of exterior surrounding, of desire that nothing should retard or thwart the abundance of their promise. But the motives urged are general and impersonal, not resting on personal affections, or making any claim to intimacies of friendship. Riper experience lays its greeting of con-

gratulation and hope at the feet of youth and promise. No touch of lurking envy, or of 'the impure passion of remorse,'<sup>1</sup> is allowed to intrude; but the contrast between the roseate dawn of life and the retrospect of chastened experience through which it is contemplated, imparts poetic pathos to sonnet after sonnet of this initial series. It is for youth to 'buy up' and fund 'its opportunities.'

Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,  
Which, used, lives th' executor to be § 4. 13-14.

and

Beauty's waste hath in the world an end,  
And, kept unus'd, the user so destroys it. § 9. 11-12.

The stateliest sonnet of this group compares the mounting sun with the declining orb:—

Lo in the Orient when the gracious light  
Lifts up his burning head, each under eye  
Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,  
Serving with looks his sacred majesty ;

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase is borrowed from R. L. Stevenson's memorial vignette of a fine soul wrecked by its own exuberance. 'Somewhere on the high seas of life, with his health, his hopes, his patrimony and his self-respect, he miserably went down. Like a spent swimmer, he came ashore, bankrupt of money and consideration; with broken wing, never more to rise. But in his face there was a light of knowledge that was new. . . . In his youth he took thought for no one but himself; when he came ashore again, his whole armada lost, he seemed to think of none but others. Such was his tenderness for others, such his instinct of fine courtesy and pride, that of that impure passion of remorse he never breathed a syllable; even regret was rare with him, and pointed with a jest' (*Memories and Portraits*). No parallel must be pressed beyond its proper limits; it is more suited to a footnote than the text; but leading traits are kindred to my reading of E. De Vere.

And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,  
 Resembling strong youth in his middle age,  
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,  
 Attending on his golden pilgrimage;  
 But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,  
Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day. . . .

§ 7. 1-10.

and in less exalted metaphor, § 15. 5-8 reads

I perceive that men as plants increase,  
 Cheer'd and check'd even by the self-same sky.  
 Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
 And wear their brave state out of memory.

Sonnet § 18 gives the first intimation of *personal* contacts, and introduces themes which through the rest of the series play a leading part. The opening lines show a warmth of personal address, which is the precursor, in sentiment and even in content, of the *Lucrece* dedication

The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end. . . .  
 To whom I wish long life still lengthened with all happinesse.

They run

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date. § 18. 1

Here, as elsewhere, the seasonal reference, repeated in *l.* 9, is probably suggested by the time of writing, and the lines may be referred to the summer of 1593, after the publication of *Venus and Adonis*. 'The eye of heaven' in *l.* 5 is found also in *Lucr.* 356 of the sun, and recurs in *Richard II* and other plays.

It may seem strange that the rejection of a daughter's hand should be the starting-point of an ideal friendship,

but the special circumstances provide easy and natural explanation. There were good reasons, as we have seen, for withdrawing a proposal which had lost favour in the eyes of all concerned. Meanwhile it had fostered personal relations between two men, who had ties and interests in common, the bridegroom elect and the father of the bride. Under the earlier Tudors, war attainders and the scaffold had gone far to extirpate the old titled nobility, and under Elizabeth religious and political disaffection had still further thinned their ranks. Few kept up cordial relations with the new administrative noblesse represented by the Cecils and Bacons; <sup>1</sup> and fewer still kept touch with the vital currents of the time, dramatic and religious. The Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Southampton were conspicuous among these exceptions; the dedications addressed to the younger Earl, by Thos. Nash and others, are enough to show from what direction the wind blew: they were no great feather in his cap, particularly when he was one among several whose favour was invoked. But the *Venus and Adonis* had far greater intrinsic worth, and was all his own: nothing, especially on the background of the early Sonnets, could have given more lively delight to a nature that was at once vain, ambitious and dependent. And weight may well be given to another consideration. A letter written by Henry Garnett, the Jesuit priest, in November 1594,<sup>2</sup> contains the remarkable statement, 'The marriage of the Lady Vere to the new Earl of Derby is deferred, by reason that he standeth in hazard to be unearled again,

<sup>1</sup> Many took refuge on the Continent; at home, neither Leicester, nor Essex, could finally escape their toils.

<sup>2</sup> To Father Robert Parsons, Nov. 19th.



his brother's wife being with child, until it is seen whether it be a boy or no. *The young Earl of Southampton, refusing the Lady Vere, payeth £5,000 of present payment.*' The money (whatever the actual amount) was presumably paid to Lord Burleigh and used for providing a suitable portion in view of Lady Elizabeth's projected marriage.

The statement throws helpful light on the doings and position of the Earl of Southampton. Under the terms of his father's will the estate had been heavily burdened, and the upkeep of Titchfield involved large outlay. But during the thirteen years of his minority, administration was subject to careful supervision. As master of his own means, he showed himself lavish and unbalanced: a little later (again on somewhat dubious authority) he is credited with a gift of £1000 to William Shakspeare; and personal extravagances on this scale go far to account for the embarrassed state of his finances recorded in 1596. In summer of 1598 he gambled heavily in Paris, in desperate and vain attempts to retrieve his fortunes; but this was a later stage, and meanwhile pecuniary as well as literary obligations created bonds between the two Earls.

In the closing lines, poetic gift and inspiration are credited to the personal rapports, which enrich the writer's verse with values that will outbrave time and pass into the eternal.

But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
 Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
     So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
     So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. § 18. 9-14.

'*This*' is the poetry which for himself, as well as for him to whom it is addressed, conveys the pledge of immortality: and the last couplet of § 19 is even more explicit

Yet do thy worst, old Time : despite thy wrong,  
*My love* shall in *my verse* ever live young.

The 'eternising' theme, modelled on Horatian and Ovidian precedents which are directly echoed in § 55, and in the *aere perennius* phrasing of § 64. 4 and § 65. 1, had become part of the Sonneteers' stock-in-trade.<sup>1</sup> But the Shakespearean treatment has a colour of its own. The ordinary use is that of high-flown compliment, that the perfections of the person or the object praised will atone for any imperfections in the praise and rescue it from oblivion: and this finds a place in § 17. 1-8.

Who will believe my verse in time to come ?  
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts—  
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb  
Which hides your life and shows not half your parts—  
If I could write the beauty of your eyes  
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,  
The age to come would say ' This poet lies ;  
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.'

But of this there is little in the Sonnets; and almost from the first it passes into a deeper note, the author's own

<sup>1</sup> For its sublimation, compare M. Drayton's 1599 Sonnet

Whilst thus my pen strives to eternize thee  
and the still finer rendering of the theme in his 1619

Where I to thee eternity shall give  
When nothing else remaineth of these days,  
And Queens hereafter shall be glad to live  
Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise.

For other references, see Lee, pp. 113-17, G. H. Rendall, 154-6.

longing for posthumous remembrance, his desire to leave behind him something that will live on in the hearts of men, the conviction that affection such as his is in its nature imperishable. As the shadows lengthen and curfew notes resound, the thought recurs with increasing force and frequency, so that one writer<sup>1</sup> would interpret the whole series as an allegorical expression of the poet's 'all-consuming desire for immortality.' Such exaggerations carry their own refutation; but it remains true that the idealised affection, upon which the Sonnets are built, creates a sense of eternal values, which for writer and recipient alike become pledges of enduring life, as in § 60, § 62, § 63. In homage rendered, the poet's recognition of beauty becomes a source of inspiration, which elates the soul to heights beyond its own. The vision and idea of beauty

sweetly creeps  
Into the study of imagination  
(*Much Ado* IV. 1. 227.)

and transforms the transient shows into a distillation of imperishable sweetness (Son. § 5. 9-14, § 54. 12-14) in which the poet-lover communicates and shares essential life.

The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem  
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

The blossoms pass, but

Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made :  
And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,  
When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth.

§ 54. 4 and 12-14

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<sup>1</sup> C. Walters in *Ephemera Critica*, 1901, p. 235.

The craving for immortality nowhere takes the form of religious conviction or belief, yet it persistently haunts the imagination of the writer, and as shades of death draw on, appeals with special force to one weighted with the sense of anonymous and unrewarded endeavour; and helps also to account for that 'constancy' in friendship, which was destined to endure such violent and repeated shocks.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom. § 116. 9-12.

The poignancy of note, it will be observed, increases as the series proceeds, and confirms the evidences that the order of original composition has been preserved.

The noble Sonnet § 55, based verbally on Horace, Ovid and later imitators, claims the reward of immortality for verse which has enjoyed so noble an inspiration, and therewith for him who brought it into being.

Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth. . . . § 55. 9-12.

Not brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea § 65. 1.

have like power to resist the wear and tear, of 'cormorant devouring Time' (§ 19. 1, compared with *L.L.L.* I. i. 4)

Nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:  
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand. § 60. 12-14.

In later Sonnets, as the shadows deepen, this hope of survival is associated with the sense of physical decay and the presentiment of approaching death (§ 74. 1-10).

When that fell arrest  
 Without all bail shall carry me away,  
 My life hath in this line some interest <sup>1</sup>  
 Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.

\* \* \* \* \*

The earth can have but earth, which is his due  
 My spirit is thine, the better part of me. § 74. 7-8.

His deepest self, his spiritual being, will survive and take effect in the remembrance of his friend. The same thought had been already played on, with pathetic appeal, in § 32, but § 81 marks a later stage,<sup>2</sup> when he has become far more assured of the survival-value attaching to his verse—and the conviction that generations to come will not let it die. *Volito vivus per ora virum.*

Your name from hence <sup>3</sup> immortal life shall have,  
 Though I, once gone, to all the world must die;  
 The earth can yield me but a common grave,  
 When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie.  
 Your monument shall be my gentle verse,  
 Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,  
 And tongues to be your being shall rehearse  
 When all the breathers of this world are dead;  
 You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—  
 Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.  
 § 81. 5-14

The personal touch in l. 2 becomes significant, when it is realised that the lines were written after the final surrender

<sup>1</sup> That is, in these lines my life will still continue to function and bear fruit. The use of 'interest' is very similar to that in § 31. 7, 'As interest of the dead'.

<sup>2</sup> I see no reason to transfer it (as Knox Pooler suggests) to follow § 18. D. Bray, on the strength of the very imperfect 'dead' rhyme, connects it with § 74, and assigns an earlier place to both.

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.* from these lines.

of the Castle Hedingham estates.<sup>1</sup> For the writer there remained in store no sepulchral honours, and no place in the mausoleum of his ancestors. It was a true forecast; <sup>2</sup> he was laid to rest without pomp or ceremony in Hackney Parish Church, and without obituary monument or inscription, till after the death of Lady Oxford in 1613.

Sonnet § 19 resumes and developes the eternising motive introduced in § 18, and together they form the proem to the brief honeymoon of friendship reflected in Group II, § 18-32. They express the romantic attraction which the flowering promise of youth awakens in one whose own hopes and aspirations have succumbed to the slings and arrows of experience, but come to life again with altruistic glow in the presence of youthful and untried adventure. It is the counterpart of the spirit of hero-worship characteristic of all generous youth, but surviving into middle age partakes more of the paternal instinct, which commits achievements denied to itself to the keeping of a darling son; such is the simile chosen by the Sonneteer himself (§ 37).

As a decrepit father takes delight  
 To see his active child do deeds of youth,  
 So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,  
 Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.  
 \* \* \* \* \*

Look, what is best, that best I wish in thee :  
 This wish I have ; than ten times happy me !

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<sup>1</sup> Completed in December, 1591.—Ward, *17th Earl*, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> In relation to William Shakspeare, the lines have neither relevance nor truth. For references to monumental honours, see *Much Ado* V. 2 ; Ben Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour*, twits Sogliardo—probably a skit on Shakspeare—on his ambitions in that direction.

And the same protective vein of solicitude—not patronage—appears in § 22. 11-12.

Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary,  
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.

Sonnet § 20—poetically one of the worst—has been subjected to gross misinterpretations, and charged with erotic intentions, which it simply will not bear. It pays tribute to the somewhat feminine type of beauty, to the flowing love-locks and glancing eyes, so often referred to in the Sonnets, on which the young Earl of Southampton fed his youthful vanity.<sup>1</sup> The comparison, or rather contrast, with mistresses of the other sex with which the Sonnet opens (l. 1-5), and the indelicate *double entendre* with which it concludes, are repugnant to our canons of taste; but in point of fact they do actually preclude the lubricious suggestions which have been fastened on them. The Sonnet in form and in content is a passing pleasantry devised for personal compliment, and never meant for publication.<sup>2</sup>

Here again, as in Group I, the motif is personal and has none of the marks of dramatic invention. The idealising affection of an older man for the charm of adolescence at the outset of its life-adventure, is no part of the sonneteering convention. Here and there it finds a place in literature, as in the affection felt by Socrates for Alcibiades, or

<sup>1</sup> See p. 37 n.

<sup>2</sup> Addressed by a provincial actor to the Earl of Southampton, the familiarities become preposterous. Knox Pooler queries Shakespearean authorship, on the ground that it is the one Sonnet in which double-rhyme endings are maintained throughout. They recur in § 87.

by Cuthbert for Myn Gau (St Mungo), but the most congenial soil is found where circumstances have thwarted or repressed 'the paternal complex,' and the readiest illustrations will be found in the memoirs of sages, recluses, monks, College dons, and the pages of modern biography. That the language should assume at times the warmth of lovers' phrase, is only natural. Poetry is the chosen vehicle for utterances which go beyond the customary restraints of personal intercourse: there, looks, motions, tokens of endearment make good the lack of words.

O learn to read what silent love hath writ  
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit. § 23. 13-14.

In Shakespeare Plays, one has but to compare the poetry with the prose, to apprehend the difference. And from Marlowe onwards, for good and for evil, richness and lusciousness of phrase became the soul of art to Elizabethan Romanticists. In Sonnet literature, in particular, as almost habitually in Dedications, strained and high-faluting phrase tended to become part of 'the poet's rage', and too often taints them with insincerity and affectation.

From such defects, apart from sporadic Euphuistic conceits, the Shakespeare Sonnets are notably free. Their 'gentle verse' is the outcome of direct and personal relations between men of high standing and cultivated tastes, inoculated with the idioms of contemporary literature. Throughout the main series there is nowhere an erotic or amatory note; the situation disallows it. Commentators who resort to that line of interpretation, create for themselves insoluble dilemmas, and tacitly or openly dismiss any idea of coherent unity of scheme or authorship.



They are content to devise circumstances to fit their reading of the particular sonnet they have in view. The source of the misunderstanding is not far to seek.

(i) In the sonneteering tradition from Petrarch onwards the love-theme was the prominent, and tended to become the exclusive interest, and Elizabethan Sonneteers accepted the convention. Following the lead of *Astrophel and Stella*, Barn. Barnes composed his *Parthenophil and Parthenope* series, Giles Fletcher his 52 sonnets to Licia, Lodge his sequence (adapted from the French) to Phillis. A convention as fixed as those of pastoral verse, demanded that every series, whatever its actual range of fancy or reflection, should pay homage to some mistress, real or feigned, so that Constable dedicates his borrowed wares to *Diana*, Daniel to *Delia*, and Drayton to *Idea*. A sonnet-sequence was supposed to concern itself with plighted or illicit love. Hence it is not surprising that in his unauthorised edition of 1640, in which the Sonnets were combined with *The Lover's Complaint*, and with other Poems, John Benson should have described them as 'His mistris drawne'. In support of his misreading, he set the mischievous precedent of transposing the order and arrangement, and went on to change masculine pronouns into feminine, to read 'faire love' and 'sweet love' in place of 'faire friend' (§ 104. 1) and 'sweet boy' (§ 108. 5), and to omit certain sonnets (e.g. § 19. 96. 126) where the object of address was unmistakably male. But arbitrary and slipshod as his methods were, his edition held its place for more than a century as the standard text, and the red herring which he drew across the trail affected criticism even to the present day.

(ii) The poetic richness with which the affections of friendship are invested and idealised helped to mislead readers, to whom Elizabethan turns and idioms of speech were unfamiliar. In Elizabethan verse, and nowhere more than in the Shakespearean plays, 'love' and 'lover' are terms of courteous description and accost, which convey no amorous suggestion. Two instances may be quoted out of scores that might be adduced. The first is general, from Brutus' address to the citizens beginning

Romans, countrymen and *lovers*. . . .

and ending with

I slew my best lover for the good of Rome.

(*Jul. Cæsar*, III. ii.)

The second may be drawn from the description of Antonio and Bassanio, who, more nearly perhaps than any characters in the Plays, reflect the relations between the Earls of Oxford and of Southampton.

*Lorenzo*. But if you knew to whom you show this honour,  
How true a gentleman you send relief,  
How dear a lover of my lord your husband

(*M.V.* III. iv. 5-7.)

to which Portia replies

In companions  
Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of love,  
There must be needs a like proportion  
Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit;  
Which makes me think that this Antonio  
Being the bosom lover of my lord. . . .

(*M.V.* III. iv. 11-17.)

Such is the usage to which the reiterated use of 'love' in

the Sonnets conforms, for which Sonnet § 32 may be taken as a typical instance.

If thou survive my well-contented day,  
 When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,  
 And shalt by fortune once more re-survey  
 These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,  
 Compare them with the bettering of the time,  
 And though they be outstripp'd by every pen,  
 Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme,  
 Exceeded by the height of happier men.  
 Oh then vouchsafe me but this loving thought :  
 ' Had my friend's Muse grown with this growing age,  
 A dearer birth than this his love had brought,  
 To march in ranks of better equipage :  
     But since he died and poets better prove,  
     Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.'

Neither in the Bible, nor in the Sonnets, had 'friendship' as yet availed to dispossess the generic term 'love'—though 'friend' conveys no less warmth of sentiment than 'lover'.<sup>1</sup>

The same may be said of words like 'sweet' and 'lovely'. 'Sweet boy' to an Elizabethan covers the whole range of affectionate concern or appreciation. It is the greeting with which Falstaff accosts his 'sweet Prince Hal' on his accession, or which Greene addresses to his fellow-satirist, 'young Juvenal', in his *Groatsworth of Wit*. Up and down the Plays, combinations like 'Sweet Cæsar', 'sweet Cassio', 'sweet Patroclus', 'sweet Oxford',

<sup>1</sup> Friendship is found once only in N.T. (*Jas.* IV. 4) and there impersonal; never in the Sonnets. 'Friend' occurs more frequently, and with no less warmth of affection, than 'lover', e.g. in 30. 13, 42. 13; § 31. 32 supply perfect illustrations. See further on p. 106.

'sweet Suffolk', or the reiterated 'sweet lord' are ubiquitous: While in the Envoi (§ 126. 1) 'my lovely boy', like the repeated 'a lovely gentleman', denotes only that which is admirable and attractive. The careful reader will note that the employment of such terms is progressive; the most ardent terms of devotion occur in the late group of Sonnets (§ 109 and following), which express constancy rather than glow in the affections, and arose out of circumstances dictating, and indeed excusing, a certain extravagance of profession.

One other consideration deserves attention, before we pass on. The fashion in language accords with that prevailing in deportment and attire. In the Court of Elizabeth, the cult of beauty, in the form of costume, jewellery, perfumes, and all decorative adjuncts—was carried to greater extremes among the men than the women. The sums, even the fortunes, expended upon elaborate and costly stuffs and makes, on jewelled and embroidered doublets, robes, hose, buckles, shoes and the rest, pass belief. Commenting on 'the great excesse of Apparell' that at this stage infected England 'as a peculiar vice incident to our Apish nation', Camden deplores the way in which 'men by their new-fashioned Garments and apparell too gawdy, discovered a certaine deformitie and insolencie of minde, whiles they jetted up and downe in theyr silkes, glittering with gold and silver eyther imbroydered or laced'. And Oxford it will be remembered in his day, and Southampton a little later, set the pace in such fashionable affectations and extravagances. Displays of the kind called for proportionate recognition. And comparisons to rose and lily, violet

and marjoram, that to our ways seem unmanly and ridiculous, were the accepted currency of courtly compliment. Judged by current conventions, nothing in § 95. 98. 99, deserves to be called unnatural or 'meretricious'; like the masque and the tilt, they do but illustrate a passing craze.

## CHAPTER V—SONNETS § 21-32

THE RIVAL POET: GEORGE CHAPMAN LINKS. STAGE-CRAFT: PAINTING: COURT LIFE. PARTED FRIENDS: RESTROSPECT AND INTROSPECT

SONNET § 21 broaches a new theme; that indeed which lay nearest to his heart—poetic composition and achievement. The Rival Poet comes upon the scene. Here too the treatment is directly personal and autobiographical, and the sonnet itself a witty skit upon poetical mannerisms, which in theme and treatment has a close counterpart in § 130. That sonnet is a *jeu d'esprit*, mocking at love-ditties or sonneteers in general; but vocabulary and manner are redolent of the *Venus* and *Lucrece* period, and the closing 'rare-compare' rhyme associates it with our Sonnet § 21

My mistress' eyes are nothing like 'the sun';  
'Coral' is far more red than her lips' red;  
If 'snow' be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be 'wires', black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen 'roses damask'd' red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some 'perfumes' is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That 'music' hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a 'goddess' go;  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever be the aim of § 130, ours is personal, and it is needless at this date to repeat the arguments, which prove that the rival aimed at is Geo. Chapman. Minto's conjecture has been reinforced and driven home by a succession of careful studies, in which Acheson, *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet* and *Shakespeare's Lost Years in London*, *Shakespeare Chapman and Sir Thos. More*, P. Allen, *Shakespeare and Chapman as Topical Dramatists*, and *Edward De Vere as William Shakespeare*, J. M. Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman* (to which may be added the Cambridge Editors' Introduction to *Love's Labour's Lost*) have done much to elucidate the literary reactions between Chapman and Shakespeare, and to solve not a few of the fantastic conundrums, in which he vents his chagrin or irritation.

So is it not with me as with that Muse,  
Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse;  
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use,  
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse;  
Making a couplement of proud compare,  
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,  
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare,  
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.  
O let me, true in love, but truly write,  
And then believe me, my love is as fair  
As any mother's child, though not so bright  
As those gold candles fix'd in heaven's air;  
Let them say more that like of hearsay well;  
I will not praise, that purpose not to sell.    § 21. 1-14.

<sup>1</sup> For parallels to 'coral', 'wires', 'damasked', see Knox Pooler and Tucker. If Chapman is in view, cf. *Hero and Leander*, iv. 290; and *Rev. Bussy d'Ambois* III. i. for use of 'wires'.

Critics have misread or missed the humour of the Sonnet. It is written, for the ear of a private friend, in a vein of light-hearted irony, which makes fun of Chapman's solemn theories of poetic diction, and of the region of similitudes appropriate to its flight. 'A painted beauty' has no reference to a person, but to the artificial creations of his Muse, denoted by one of his own favourite epithets. Compare 'this *painted* light,' and 'but *paint*' in the *Hymn to Night*, l. 310. 377, and (a little later) 'the painted beast' in the induction to *Hero and Leander* Sest. IV. 'Rehearse' and 'coplement of proud compare' are admirable adaptations of the Chapman manner, while 'things rare, That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems' is in the best vein of Calverley parody, twitting his partiality for invented substantives in *-ure*.<sup>1</sup> In 'truly write' (l. 9) he probably plays on his own name *Vere*; <sup>2</sup> while in the closing distich, 'hearsay'—meaning cant and platitude—very possibly puns on 'heresy'; and an Elizabethan euphuist could not but find *Chapman's* own name irresistible in 'I will not praise that purpose not to sell.'<sup>3</sup> There can be little doubt that the more malicious 'base sale of *chapmen's* tongues' and again 'To things of sale a *seller's* praise belongs' in *Love's Lab. Lost* II. i. 16, IV. iii. 240, have the same personal application, and the Berowne sonnets there introduced

<sup>1</sup> For a telling list, to which others might be added, see Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman*, p. 55. 'Extensure' in the Harriotts dedication is one of the best parallels. 'Hems' occurs twice in *V.A.* 229 and 1022, not elsewhere in Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> See Note on § 76, pp. 144-5.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman*, p. 109, treats the passing pun too seriously.



are a companion setting to this. The Play goes further than the sonnet in topical badinage aimed at the 'School of Night,' and in the person of Holofernes introduces a broad burlesque of Chapman; but in neither do I find traces of bitter or malicious hostility, especially when we remember that the sonnet, and probably too the Play, were *jeux d'esprit* composed for personal and more or less privileged entertainment. Thus the sonnet has more than one kind of incidental interest: first, as a witness to the preservation of chronological order in the Sonnets as printed: and secondly, to the place which poetic composition had gained in the preoccupations of the writer. In the first flush of new-found friendship, this is the side on which he is most sensitive.

The time-problems involved are perplexed and to some extent conjectural, but the sequences seem reasonably secure. Of Chapman's earlier career no details are known, except that he was born at Hitchin, that his academic training was probably derived from Oxford (though no documentary evidence of matriculation or graduation survives), and that in part at least his vocation seems to have been that of tutor or schoolmaster at his native place. His earliest dated poem, *The Shadow of Night*, did not appear till 1594, when he had already reached the age of forty-five, but publication was due to the appreciation it elicited from Marlowe, whose untimely death took place in 1593 at the end of May. That prior to that date he had practised the art of poetry seems certain, if it be true that Marlowe committed to him the completion of his *Hero and Leander*. And among the trial runs it is reasonable to place *The Coronet*

for his *Mistress Philosophy*, and *The Amorous Zodiac*, first-fruits of his Muse attached to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* published in 1595. Thus there is good reason for believing (with Acheson)<sup>1</sup> that *The Amorous Zodiac*<sup>2</sup> is the poem whose author

The heaven itself for ornament doth use,  
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse. § 21. 3-4.

The verbal echoes in

‘Sun and moon, with earth and sea’s rich gems,  
With April’s first-born flowers’

seem direct and unmistakable, though it would be hard to imagine kindlier or more indulgent criticism than our sonnet applies to that amazing product of the Muse: it is a playful pricking of Academic bladders. But their author would be the last to kiss the rod, however gently applied. His poetic gifts were vitiated by a jealous and pedantic egoism, which was fatal to their fruition. His best work was achieved under the curb of translation, from Homer, from Hesiod, or more indirectly in the *Hero and Leander* continuation. Left to himself, his own tastes and idiosyncrasies drove him to every sort of rococo contortion and extravagance; while at heart he envied the effects, which his forced and pompous pedantries could never achieve. It is easy to read between the

<sup>1</sup> See Acheson, *Rival Poet, Shakespeare's Lost Years in London*, and *Shakespeare Sonnet Story*, pp. 310-13.

<sup>2</sup> The three last lines

If not in heaven, amongst those braving fires,  
Yet here thy beauties, which the world admires,  
Bright as those flames shall glister in my verse

suggest verbal parody.

lines of his earliest Dedications. Like the poems themselves, they are an outcome of mortified self-esteem, rankling under a sense of neglect, and want of appreciation. He had hoped for noble and learned patronage, in particular that of the Earl of Southampton. The omission of his name, beside the tributes paid to 'most ingenious Darby, deep-searching Northumberland, and skill-embracing heir of Hunsdon,' tells its own story.<sup>1</sup> And at the last moment Chapman had to fall back on his 'Most worthy Friend, Master Matthew Roydon,'<sup>2</sup> author of the *Astrophel Elegy* to Philip Sidney, and by some supposed to have written *Willobie his Avis*.

*Odi Profanum Vultus* is the key-note of the Dedications and the Poems, as he seethes with almost inarticulate disgust against 'the common herd', who ventured to question the superior excellence of his own genius and learning.

Presume not then ye flesh-confounded souls,  
That cannot bear *the full Castalian bowls*.<sup>3</sup>

where the reference to the *Venus and Adonis* motto is unmistakable. Still more must he have writhed under the rollicking caricature of *Love's Labour's Lost*,<sup>4</sup> composed

<sup>1</sup> See Prefatory letters to *The Shadow of Night*, and to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*. The noblemen referred to are Wm. Stanley, the 6th Earl of Derby, who in Sept. 1594 was betrothed to Lady Elizabeth de Vere, Henry Percy 9th Earl of Northumberland, and Sir George Carey, later Lord Hunsdon, who succeeded to the Barony in 1596. All of them were actively connected with the stage.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dedicatory letter to *Shadow of Night*.

<sup>3</sup> *Shadow of Night—Hymnus in Cynthiam*.

<sup>4</sup> On Chapman motives introduced, and his identification with Holofernes, see Cambridge, *Love's Labour's Lost*, xvi pp.

it would seem in the first instance for the diversion of the literary coterie which enjoyed the hospitalities of the Earl of Southampton. To be 'the cause of wit in others' is a trial for tempers far less splenetic than George Chapman's, and he was so totally devoid of humour, that he even thought to retaliate upon the applause accorded to the *Venus and Adonis* with his own *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*. It was enough to stir compassion even in an adversary, but these and further reprises it will be better to postpone till we reach the later stage in Sonnets § 78-86.<sup>1</sup>

Sonnet § 22 should be read in connexion with § 23. They result from some interchange of personal intercourse, in which the writer had felt chilled by lack of adequate response in the return of friendship. With so vain and egoistic a nature as that of Southampton this was indeed inevitable, and later illustrations will abound. The sonnet is a warning against playing fast and loose with friendship; to shilly-shally with the affections is to inflict on them a deadly hurt.

Presume not on *thy* heart, when mine is slain;  
Thou gav'st me thine, not to give back again.

§ 22. 13-14.

In composition, Son. § 23, with its unity of theme and handling, its delicate interplay of words ('perfect,' 'fear,' 'look,' 'love') and figures, its perfect phrasing (*e.g.* l. 5-6, 13-14), is one of the most engaging of the series.

As an unperfect actor on the stage,  
Who with his fear is put besides his part,  
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,  
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;

---

<sup>1</sup> See further on pp. 146-7.

So I, for fear of trust, forget to say  
 The perfect ceremony of love's rite,  
 And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,  
 O'ercharg'd with burthen of mine own love's might.  
 O let my books be, then, the eloquence  
 And dumb presagers of my speaking breast;  
 Who plead for love, and look for recompense  
 More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.  
 O learn to read what silent love hath writ:  
 To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

The opening metaphor has been claimed by commentators in support of Wm. Shakspeare authorship: it gains much in appropriateness if ascribed to Edward de Vere. It is matter of history that he himself composed, produced, and acted in Court Masques; still more that, with the help of Lyly and Munday, he lavished means, interest and resources in the management of companies of actors. And the metaphor, it will be observed, is treated from the view-point of the director and onlooker, not that of the actor himself. This is in keeping with the Dramas, where 'the Play within the Play' is a characteristic feature and device. The Theseus comments on the players in *Mids. Night's Dream* V. i. 95-105 are an expansion of our Sonnet

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,  
 Make periods in the midst of sentences,  
 Throttle their practis'd accent in their fears,  
 And, in conclusion, dumbly have broke off,  
 Not paying me a welcome. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity  
 In least speak most, to my capacity.

'O'ercharg'd with burthen of mine own love's might' echoes the 'O'ercharg'd with wretchedness' of *M.N.D.*

V. i. 85, and the twice-repeated 'overdone' of Hamlet's injunctions and cautions to the Players (*Hamlet* III. ii. 15 and 22). In the second quatrain, where the leading couplet is among the most perfect in the Sonnets, 'for fear of trust' is so pregnant that one hesitates to analyse,<sup>1</sup> but my own impression is that the primary reference is to that sense of hesitating self-distrust which a sensitive nature feels in making overtures, which may be imperfectly reciprocated.

From his own special field of interest in Drama, he turns to that of his friend in Painting, and as in *Venus and Adonis* and at full length in *Lucrece* 1366 vv., 1506, elaborates conceits, into which for our purpose it is needless to enter. The main point is that the image of his friend pictured upon his heart surpasses in truth and in beauty anything that the most gifted painter can achieve—a thought already broached in § 16. 10-12. In painting—particularly in the arts of miniature and illumination—Southampton was a connoisseur, and surviving portraits are more numerous than those of any other noble contemporary.<sup>2</sup> As an incidental corroboration, the coincidence is worth noting, and the more so that in the Plays references to paintings are comparatively rare.<sup>3</sup>

### SONNET § 25

No sonnet is more simply and directly personal in its phrasing—a transcript from experience to which direct-

<sup>1</sup> Beeching and Tucker supply four different interpretations, and both prefer 'looks' to the Q reading 'books' in l. 9.

<sup>2</sup> G. H. Rendall, pp. 123-4.

<sup>3</sup> See *Shakespeare's England*, II. pp. 5-14.

ness lends most part of its charm. Except in some remote or fanciful way,<sup>1</sup> none of the terms fit the relations and circumstances of Wm. Shakspeare, while as addressed by the Earl of Oxford to Southampton, every word seems apposite. 'In favour with their stars,' with which it starts, is indeed a commonplace of current astrology, illustrated by § 14 and § 15, and repeated in § 26. 9, but none the less is specially apposite in the mouth of a De Vere, whose five-rayed star (or mullet) held the place of honour among the family insignia: 'of public honour and proud titles,' the spite of 'fortune' had debarred him (see 14. 5, 29. 1, 37. 3, 90. 3. 12, 111. 1) from their just reward, yet in compensation for that loss he held the prize of an affection which outweighed them all. The next quatrain is a perfect vignette of the Court of Elizabeth, familiar to himself and to Southampton. The marigold was her symbolic flower, as Lyly writes in *Euphues*: 'She (Elizabeth) useth the marigold for her flower, which at the rising of the sunne openeth his leaves, and at the setting shutteth them, referring all her actions and endeavours to him that ruleth the sunne.' Both their fathers had experienced the vicissitudes of royal favour: both had sunned themselves in their monarch's eye; Oxford at least had wilted under her frown; already Southampton was aware of gathering clouds. And when we come to the third quatrain, though the language goes far beyond anything that De Vere could reasonably claim for himself, it would

<sup>1</sup> Robertson, pp. 185, 196, supposes it addressed to a woman, and finds it impossible to reconcile § 23. 24. 25. 26 as written by *Wm. Sh.* to Southampton.

be hard to name any among Elizabeth's Captains so deserving to be styled

A painful warrior famoused for fight

as Sir Francis Vere<sup>1</sup> and his brother Sir Horace. Thus in this declaration of affectionate regard each line fits naturally to its place, and leads on to the culminating assurance

Then happy I, that love and am beloved  
Where I may not remove nor be removed.

### SONNET § 26

Most Commentators call attention to resemblances between this sonnet and the Dedication to *Lucrece*; and the affinities of tone and sentiment show that it belongs to the *Lucrece*, not the *Venus and Adonis*, stage of relationship. But it is a mistake to regard it as either *envoi*, or preface, to any collected 'book' of Sonnets. There is no warrant for any such thing; it runs counter to all the interior evidence; and in this very sonnet 'tatter'd loving' l. 11, as well as the last line

Till then not show my head where thou mayst prove me

are incongruous with any such suggestion. It is a parting salutation on the eve of a journey (connected with some kind of social discredit), and with an absence which covers the next twenty sonnets, furnishing collateral proof that the original order of composition has been preserved. The opening lines

<sup>1</sup> In 1588 he was knighted for gallant services, and from 1589 to 1594 held the command in Holland.



Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage  
 Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,  
 To thee I send this written ambassage  
 To witness duty, not to show my wit

are couched in the language of mutual obligation. In the vocabulary of ceremonial courtesy, neither 'Lord,' 'vassalage' nor 'duty' (*devoir*), convey the least touch of servility: on the contrary, they imply mutual dignity of relation, and would be unsuitable and indeed presumptuous on the lips of a plebeian client addressing a noble patron.

## SONNETS 27-9

Sonn. § 27-8 embark upon a new chapter of experiences. Their realistic portrayal of the discomforts of travel is a crucial challenge to those who regard the Sonnets as poetic inventions of a fashionable mode, and also throws a useful side-light on the neurotic storms to which the writer was subject under the strain of physical fatigue. Written in temporary exile, under clouds of depression and obloquy, these companion sonnets are among the most moving in the whole series.<sup>1</sup> Each is a veritable *cri de coeur*, in which the tragedy of his own mistakes and failures evokes the magnanimity of soul, which transmutes his own reverses and miscarriages into

<sup>1</sup> Hampered by the Shakspeare tradition, yet perceiving how irreconcilably they conflict with the client-patron hypothesis, Robertson is driven to suppose ('dear friend' notwithstanding) that they are addressed to a woman (or women) confidante; while Massey seriously propounds that they were commissioned by Southampton, in pursuit of his courtship of Elizabeth Vernon: Robertson's critical acumen is at continual loggerheads with his poetic appreciation.

matin songs of hope and expectation for the happier future of his friend. Apart from its place in the immediate context, the (§ 29. 11-12) couplet

Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven's gate

is fraught with personal literary significance. The words are familiar, as they reappear in the exquisite *Cymbeline* lyric (II. iii. 22)

Hark, hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings.

But *Cymbeline* did not borrow from the Sonnet; both alike are founded on the Trico Song inserted in Lyly's *Campaspe*, produced in 1589

The lark . . .  
at heaven's gate she claps her wings.  
The morn not waking till she sings.

These Lyly songs, as is well known, formed no part of the text, until the publication of the completed 1632 edition: they remained in manuscript, from the time when Lyly was acting as Manager to the Earl of Oxford's group of players: and it can hardly be doubted that they were contributed by the Earl's own hand; and that he utilised the old theme for *Cymbeline*, in the same way that he readapted the pixies' song in *Endymion* for use in the *Merry Wives* V. v., and the *Comedy of Errors* V. ii. 196.

But to return to the lines themselves; in their present context, they gain added force and beauty thus juxtaposed with the defeatist sense of personal failure and self-condemnation, by which they are introduced. He writes

as a discredited and broken man.<sup>1</sup> The exact nature of the 'disgrace' to which he refers—moral, pecuniary, political or social—it is impossible to define, except through careful and secure synchronising of dates. But Oxford's career is only too full of disasters, more or less irretrievable, from the time when in *Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576) onwards, he bewailed 'this loss of my good name.' Whatever the precise allusion, it carried a slur, or stigma, which cut deep into a nature as sensitive as it was wayward and uncontrolled. It produced that cast of introspective 'melancholia,' whimsical or passionate, which finds various utterance in Jaques, Hamlet, Macbeth, or the overwhelming crescendos of Timon or King Lear. Here it is held in reserve; but in later Sonnets § 71. 72. 81, we shall meet with it at higher tension of self-disparagement.

Lines 7 and 8 are tantalising in suggestion. The first contrasts his own lot with that of others (including Southampton himself) born under a happier star. The second

With what I most enjoy contented least

I cannot refrain from referring to those dramatic activities<sup>2</sup> in which his genius found its freest scope, but which none the less entailed a life-long series of mortifications.

<sup>1</sup> Compare p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> It is surprising to find Dowden (*in loc.*) advancing a similar surmise, which I should find it hardly possible to apply to Wm. Shakspeare.

## SONNET § 30

Sonnet § 30, with something less of vital sincerity, descants on the same theme, viewed from the side of retrospect. Looking back on the chequered tale of lost joys, hopes forfeited, and friends that are no more, he finds solace in the one affection that has power to replace them all. It represents the outlook and experience of middle age; and is incompatible with thirty. And the words

‘ While I think on thee, dear friend ’

in *l.* 13 exclude dramatic invention.

Sonnet § 31 is a further variation on the same theme. It contains fine poetry, especially in *l.* 5-6

How many a holy and obsequious tear  
Hath dear religious love stol’n from mine eye

and

Thou art the grave where buried love doth live  
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone.    *l.* 9-10.

They evince the writer’s susceptibility to those æsthetic values of religion which the Chantry tombs at Hedingham were so well calculated to promote, and which we shall meet again in § 125—as well as incidentally in the Plays. But we are left with the impression that, in the desire to please, he has allowed fancy rather than feeling to take charge, and that for a new-formed friendship it is of doubtful augury that it should absorb and supersede all friendships of the past.

## SONNET § 32

In respect of language we have already had occasion to consider § 32. There is no clearer instance of the self-conscious criticism which he applied to his own productions. As a daring innovator he was the target for unsparing criticism, and could not forecast the pre-eminence he was destined to attain; yet with the years the conviction grew that he would leave behind him verse 'that the world would not willingly let die' (cf. § 38. 55. 74 and see note on p. 77). For the time being he bases his claim on personal affection;

These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover  
and

Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love  
are no mere affectation of humility; and the closing lines  
are unmistakably from peer to peer, not from client to  
noble patron.

## CHAPTER VI—SONNETS § 33-42, WITH § 133-152

### FRIENDSHIP DISHONoured

SONNET § 33 announces the catastrophic breach in the loyalties of friendship, and introduces the episode with which Sonnets § 33-42 in the main series, and a number of the supplementary Sonnets (§ 133-52), are directly connected, while its influence can be traced in not a few others, such as § 69, 70, 94, 119, 120. As a key to understanding of the Sonnets it is crucial, and it is a misfortune that its nature should have done so much to confuse issues, and to restrict or alienate appreciation of the Sonnets themselves.

First, then, they are a decisive proof that the texture of the Sonnets is personal and autobiographical. Attempts to explain them as allegorical, or vicarious, or sportive plays of fancy, are poor makeshifts. They represent a situation which no sonneteer would devise, or exploit, as telling or attractive or suited for display of poetic invention and skill. The facts are unmistakable and nakedly realistic; they are drawn from the life. During the period of absence (covered by § 26-32), the friend to whom the Sonnets are addressed fell under the fascination of the writer's mistress (41. 7-14), yielded to her solicitations, and not once only, but even after protest and remonstrance, continued to reciprocate her favours.

Sonnets inspired by such a theme necessarily lack artistic unity, as they answer to the gusts and reactions of conflicting moods (§ 34-42, 133, 144, 147, 152)—of resentment, compunction, remonstrance or disgust. They begin with a superb outburst of disillusioned trust.

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
 Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;  
 Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
 With ugly rack on his celestial face,  
 And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
 Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace :  
 Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
 With all triumphant splendour on my brow ;  
 But out, alack ! he was but one hour mine ;  
 The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.  
 Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth ;  
 Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.

But they soon fall away into forced casuistries (§ 35, 36, 40-42), or half-hearted extenuations, or impotent ejaculations of revolt, such as may be read in § 135, 137, 144, 147. It is needless to dissect details, or pry into futile personalities, but it is vital to grasp certain general inferences and conclusions which attach to this Section of the Sonnets.

On the ethical side, there are few departments of morals on which any particular community, or age, or generation, is more likely to err in its estimate of another, than in the codes of sexual behaviour. The Victorian ' Age of Ex-purgation ' placed the Sonnets outside the pale of standardised comment or perusal. Even so cool and level-headed a critic as Hallam pronounced it impossible not to wish

that Shakespeare had never written the Sonnets. To the literary conventions of to-day, such a judgment reads like childish prudery. Whatever may have been true of other grades or classes of Elizabethan society, in the world of rank and fashion, apart from recognised social etiquettes, there was no requirement of personal chastity. The Court itself, as shown in the lives of all the chief actors, was a hot-bed of amorous intrigue, and the Queen's own perennial coquetries did much to foster the spirit and exhibition of wantonness. Such are the assumptions under which the Sonnets are framed. There is no reprobation of lapses natural to youth: they are taken for granted, and frankly condoned

When a woman woos, what woman's son  
Will sourly leave her till she have prevailed? § 41. 7-8.

and later, in more graceful form

Some say, thy fault is youth, some wantonness;  
Some say, thy grace is youth and gentle sport;  
Both grace and faults are loved of more and less:  
Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort. § 96. 1-4.

Thus there is no real inner contradiction, as some object,<sup>1</sup> when in § 70 he writes

And thou present'st a pure unstained prime:  
Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,  
Either not assail'd, or victor, being charged. § 70. 8-10.

Reproach turns wholly on the point of honour involved by the tie of personal friendship. The misconduct lay in disloyalty to friendship, in the indignity inflicted upon a relationship of trust. This cut him to the quick—

<sup>1</sup> See later, on Son. § 70. p. 118.



Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss :  
 The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief  
 To him that bears the strong offence's cross. § 34. 10-12.

and similar reflections in § 36, § 42. 12, 120, 133, 144, show how it left wounds that never completely healed.

Meanwhile it gave birth to a conflict of emotions, full of psychological interest, voiced in the couplet that immediately follows:

Ah ! but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,  
 And they are rich and ransom all ill deeds. § 34. 13-14.

The lines epitomise the weakness of moral fibre, the unresolved conflict of impulses, uniquely dramatised not only in *Hamlet*,<sup>1</sup> but in just those *dramatis personae* who seem most intimately to reflect the temperamental idiosyncrasies of their creator.

A parallel conflict of the emotions—at a still higher grade of interior tension—is preserved in § 129, which voices the violence of the sexual urge, followed by fierce revulsions of self-disgust. Nowhere is self-revelation more direct, or 'secrets of the heart' more visibly 'unlocked'. In § 144, 146, 147 the same theme finds personal illustration, but the position of § 129 among the miscellaneous and appended group throws some doubt upon its association with this particular episode. Whether that be so or not, there can be no reasonable doubt that the temptress may be identified with the 'dark lady' depicted or addressed in most of the subsidiary Sonnets § 131-52.

Coincidences of expression are numerous and marked.

<sup>1</sup> As in the typical scene III. iii., where Hamlet declines to strike the King while engaged in prayer.

Sonnet § 133, probably the first (in this B series) to deal with this episode, opens

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan  
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me !  
Is't not enough to torture me alone,  
But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be ?

' Deep wound ' in *l.* 2 repeats

That heals *the wound* and cures not the disgrace § 34. 8 ;  
' my friend (*l.* 2. 10), and ' sweet'st friend ' (*l.* 4) reiterate the phrase used in the same connexion § 42. 8. 10. 13, and elsewhere. It is the term appropriated to the recipient in the Sonnets, and ' my sweet'st friend ' cannot be transferred at random to other claimants. In *l.* 6 ' my next self ' is even more specific, corresponding to ' all the better part of me ' in § 39. 2, and ' my friend and I are one ' in § 42. 13. To interpret the *alter ego* as a loose description of some third party, is tantamount to rejecting all unity of authorship. Two lines later, the rather unusual ' cross'd ' is the word used in the same connexion in § 42. 12, as well as in § 34. 12, ' the strong offence's cross '—so that throughout the same terms are used to denote the same situation.

And this identity of situation is in itself the most compelling evidence. His dearest friend has been captured by the solicitations of the writer's own mistress; she holds him in her toils with fascinations, which he himself had found irresistible; their very potency is proof of a certain spiritual or affectional affinity—and in both series it is sophisticated with parallel legal and psychological conceits, derived from tenure, mortgage, occupancy, right of user, or the metaphysical union of companion wills or souls. (Compare § 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, with § 133, 134, 137.)

There is no need to push analysis further. It is surely inconceivable that so ugly a complication should have been twice experienced, and twice sonnetised by a single writer, and finally committed to print with its inherent self-contradictions.

As regards the question of authorship, the whole episode, in the commission and repetition of offence, and far more in the terms and spirit with which it is handled, precludes all possibility of accepting the traditional authorship. As between social equals moving amid the fashions of high life, the relations disclosed are intelligible, and not incongruous with the temper of the times, or the evidence of the Plays; but to ascribe them to Wm. Shakspeare and the Earl of Southampton, is to fly in the face of the elementary assumptions of social status and behaviour. It is easy to turn a blind eye to the discussion or to build up fancy hypotheses, but if once the issues are fairly faced, they leave no room for acceptance of orthodox tradition.

No sooner had the first shock of discovery been spent, than the offence was condoned, pardoned (§ 34), and overtly minimised (§ 35. 42). The situation was in fact accepted, and remained unchanged § 40-2; but there is no reason to suppose that it was much prolonged: in § 120. 1, 13-14 it is referred to as part of a more or less distant past

That *you* were once unkind befriends *me* now.  
But that your trespass now becomes a fee;  
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

For one thing, absence, which seems to extend over § 52, helped to mitigate the sense of affront, and obviated personal recriminations. Further, it seems likely that

the reasons which impelled absence acted in the same direction. Materials are not forthcoming to determine its precise cause or duration. But it is clear that the severance was enforced, reluctant, and prolonged over a considerable time; and that it was associated with some kind of social ostracism. Sonnet § 36. 9-12 can hardly bear any other interpretation.

I may not ever more acknowledge thee,  
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,  
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,  
Unless thou take that honour from thy name.

His fear is that any public avowal of friendship will compromise and bring discredit on his friend's repute, and the same thought runs through § 88-9. It implies some kind of public exposure or disgrace: but there was more than one direction and occasion, in which Oxford's reputation was tarnished. Moral misdemeanours, political charges and delinquencies, scandals connected with the stage, all come into question, but the expressions used—particularly, 'my bewailed guilt'—point to the first of these alternatives. In any case, it is hard to bring them into any plausible connexion with Wm. Shakspeare.

#### SONNETS § 37-51

Though friendship was too precious to be forgone  
(§ 37, § 40. 14)

Kill me with spites ; yet we must not be foes,  
there is a pronounced drop in the temperature of trust

Let me confess that we two must be twain  
Although our undivided lives are one.

§ 36. 1-2, cf. § 39. 5.

The change of note is marked: the topics chosen become more impersonal; the writer takes refuge in the elaboration of conceits—on poetry in § 38, on painting in § 47, on the elements in § 44-5, on legal pleas and tenure of the affections in § 46-49, on 'posting' thoughts in § 50-51; so that though graceful or witty touches are not wanting, in point of feeling and intimacy this section of the Sonnets is the most perfunctory of all. Prolonged separation heightens the sense of insecurity in the affections, and it is not till § 52 that he looks forward to the renewal of personal contacts, as a festal celebration of past occasions for rejoicing, instinct with resuscitated hopes.

## CHAPTER VII—SONNETS § 52-70

### RENEWAL OF FRIENDSHIP—EBB AND FLOW— APPREHENSIONS AND WARNINGS

#### SONNET § 52

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key  
Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,  
The which he will not every hour survey,  
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure.  
Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,  
Since, seldom coming, in the long year set,  
Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,  
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.

Built upon motives similar to those of § 40, but far more admirable in composition, the Sonnet is replete with the decorative opulence, in which the nobles and courtiers of the period were wont to indulge. From the Earl of Oxford to the Earl of Southampton, every word is in place, and charged with personal allusions. To ascribe it to the hand of a commoner, to treat it as mere sonneteering fancy, or to suppose it addressed to a woman, is to rob it of half its poetic values and all its personal significance.

Sonnet § 53 is too artificial in its vein of compliment to be pleasing. The play on 'substance' and 'shadows' (as reflections from the Ideal) is a Euphuistic commonplace, familiar from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and other plays, and from *Lucrece* as well as earlier Sonnets (§ 37 and § 43).

Here it is overstrained, more in the manner of Chapman (as Robertson observes) than Shakespeare. And in the next quatrain the classical comparisons are vapid and lifeless. That

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit  
Is poorly imitated after you

has direct reference to the *Venis and Adonis*, seems beyond reasonable doubt. It is direct, pointed, personal, in one of the most prosaic couplets in the Sonnets: it gives (as we have seen) the key to right interpretation; it was penned at a time when the poem was on all lips, and had gained sensational success, as the successive editions of 1593, 1594, 1596, and later, declare: at such a moment the allusion carries its own identification, and could not be mistaken. The companion couplet 'On Helen's cheek' is strongly reminiscent of the tapestry scenes in *Lucrece*, which at this moment (or very recently) was in course of composition. And the conjoint allusions (never intended for print) go far to redeem the lines from tame futility.

### SONNET § 54-5

Sonnet § 54, playing on the rose and canker conceit, utilised in *Lucrece*<sup>1</sup> and reappearing in 1 *Henry IV*, I. iii. 176, does not reach the level of Sonnet § 5 in its attempt to rekindle the warmth of past affection, and cannot compare in power with § 55, where the echoes from the classic Muse (*l.* 1-2), the appeal to ancestral glories (*l.* 3-4), and the suggestions of military prowess and distinction, are in closer touch with the actualities of writer and recipient.

<sup>1</sup> On its parallel use in E. de Vere's early Poems, see pp. 123-4.

More durable than all of these is the tribute which the poet alone can render, the guerdon of immortality.<sup>1</sup>

### SONNET § 56

In the opening

Sweet love, renew thy force

love is obviously not personal, but apostrophises the sentiment of attachment, an appeal for the renewal of intimate response. At this stage of the Sonnets, it is clear from which side the longing for affection proceeded. To the author it was all in all—his surviving contact with high life, and the vicarious ambition to which he clung; and it provided too that outlet for poetic utterance, which was a master-instinct of his nature. From the other side, so far as we can judge, the overtures and professions of affection were welcomed, tolerated, or ignored, as occasion or self-interest suggested; from § 34 onwards, there is nothing to suggest that they elicited much warmth of response, and this is quite in keeping with the Southampton disposition. The emotional longing for sympathetic response, instead of ‘a perpetual dullness’ (l. 8), finds charming expression in the Hero and Leander simile of the last quatrain.

<sup>1</sup> It seems likely that Meres in his parallel citations in the *Palladis Tamia* (1598) had this Sonnet in mind. Tucker proposes to reverse the obligation and to regard it as an acknowledgment of the compliments paid by Meres; but it is hard to reconcile this with the strong personal emphasis—‘*you-yourself, your memory, your praise, you live*’—which runs throughout. And in truth, where the references belong so much to the common stock, the passages may well be independent.



Let this sad interim like the ocean be  
 Which parts the shore, where two contracted new  
 Come daily to the banks, that when they see  
 Return of love, more blest may be the view.

It was much in the author's thoughts in connexion with the completion of Marlowe's posthumous poem, glanced at in the Valentine and Proteus opening of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (I. i. 20-26). Here the treatment is a reminder of *V.A.* 817-18.

as one on shore  
 Gazing upon a late-embarked friend

and the passage gains special appositeness, if the temporary severance was due to one of Southampton's absences across the Channel.

### SONNETS § 57-8

Following in its wake, Sonnets § 57-8 strike too abject a note of self-abasement. It is true that 'slave' (thrice-repeated in § 57. 1. 11, § 58. 1) for 'servant' or 'suitor' is an accepted term in the language of courtship, and 'sovereign' and 'vassal'<sup>1</sup> are entitled to indulgence in the vocabulary of feudalism, but even so self-respecting affection does not do well to own itself

tame to sufferance, or bide each check  
 Without accusing you of injury.<sup>2</sup> § 58. 7-8

Complaint in the form of foregoing all right to complain, is no effective weapon of redress, and even tends to invite contempt. But such excesses of self-dispraise, or of its

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Vassalage' in § 26. 1, with its parallel in Spenser's Sonnet to Lord Grey of Wilton.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* of wrong inflicted.

obverse, self-esteem, are perhaps inseparable from the keen and mobile sensibilities capable of achieving the highest triumphs of the Tragic or the Comic Muse. It is a neap tide in the ebb and flow of friendship. Deprivation of intercourse galls him with the fear of being supplanted in his friend's esteem; but on the strength of brave memories in the past, ancestral <sup>1</sup> and personal, he refuses to believe that affections so deeply-rooted in the past can be destined, notwithstanding temporary eclipse, to undergo eventual defeat.

### SONNET § 60

Were it possible to assign an order of merit to individual sonnets, Sonnet § 60 could not fail to find a place among the select. Through stately images, with perfect mastery of thought and word, it moves to its conclusion.

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow :  
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

As years pass, and Time's relentless touch assails all forms of perishable beauty, there still remain 'bright shoots of everlastingness,' impervious to his blight; and the poet resumes that 'eternising' hope, which with each advancing symptom of decay (see § 62. 10, 63. 1-4) becomes more concrete and persistent.<sup>2</sup> Coupled with forced and at times excessive references to charms unrivalled

<sup>1</sup> The 'five hundred courses of the sun' refer to the five centuries of fame, which distinguished the De Veres.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 77.

in the present (§ 67-8) and unequalled in the past (§ 59), this becomes the leading motive in this subsection (§ 59-68). Though they themselves must yield to Time's 'cruel hand' (§ 60), the tribute which they have inspired will outlive all monuments of marble, brass, or steel (§ 64. 4, § 65. 1), will defy all ravages and denudations of encroaching Time (§ 60), and confer upon praised and praiser alike imperishable life.

His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,  
And they shall live, and he in them still green.

§ 63. 13-14, 65. 14.

Associated with premonitions of the impending end (§ 100), the thought remains a source of abiding consolation. Enshrined in memory, his deepest self—'the better part of me' (§ 74. 9)—will never die.

Death to me subscribes,  
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rime.

§ 107. 10-11.

Sonnets of this conventional or honorific type do right to abstain from topical allusion, but do not exclude the expression of personal relations, from which they derive their impulse; and many such are interspersed. Sonnet § 66 is not a sonnet of personal address, but of introspective chagrin. It stands almost alone among the Sonnets in disregard for structural form. It is a long-drawn sigh of disillusion and disgust with life, in which, coupled by monotonous 'Ands,'<sup>1</sup> line follows line enumerating the

<sup>1</sup> For a close literary parallel, see the *Rejected Lover* stanzas contributed by the Earl of Oxford to *Par. Dainty Devices* (1596), and like treatment of initial 'Who' in the *Tears of Fancy* Sonnet (1593); with instructive parallels in *Lucrece*, St. 127, 128, 135-7, 141. All come from the same hand.

cabals of self-seeking and intrigue, against which all struggle was vain.

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,  
As, to behold desert a beggar born,  
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,  
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,  
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,  
And strength by limping sway disabled,  
And art made tongue-tied by authority,  
And folly doctor-like controlling skill,  
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,  
And captive good attending captain ill—

Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone. § 66.

The ingredients of revolt do not turn upon slights or wrongs inflicted on the oppressed, but are the revulsion produced by the vanities that wait on high estate—the sense of merit overlooked, of good faith and loyalty defamed and discountenanced, of virtue victimised, of strength, skill and honesty brow-beaten by the arts of the place-hunter and the sycophant. For a contemporary parallel we may turn to the soliloquy of Hamlet (III. i. 68-74); or the retrospect of Sir John Harington, himself a godson of Queen Elizabeth, summarising his experiences of Court corruption in these words—

I have spent my time, my fortune, and almost my honestie, to buy false hope, false friends, and shallow praise; and be it remembered that he who casteth up this reckoning of a courtlie minion, will sett his summe like a foole at the ende, for not being a knave at the beginninge.

They are exactly what might be expected from the Earl of

Oxford in his retirement, while to anything in Wm. Shakspeare's life (apart from sheer dramatic invention) they are totally irrelevant.

The sonnets of personal compliment (§ 65, 67, 68, 69) exceed the restraints which modern taste imposes, but letters, dedications, commendatory verses of the period combine to show how widely Elizabethan etiquettes in this respect differ from our own. Compared with the effusions <sup>1</sup> of Nash in prose and verse, or of Barnabe Rich, or even of John Florio, they are restrained and moderate. Their value lies in measuring the aristocratic pride and vanity which they were designed to satisfy, and the warmth of personal regard with which the writer watched the promise of his opening career. But they by no means stand alone; beside them we must set the sonnets of warning, apprehension, and open reproof, tactful but undisguised, such as befit the intercourse of friends of equal degree, but are entirely out of keeping with any client and patron relationship. Sonnet § 61 conveys the note of warning, and dwells on sleepless nights disturbed by thoughts of intrigues and escapades likely to compromise his friend's career.

For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,  
From me far off, with others all too near. § 61. 13-14.

Southampton's early indiscretions were by no means limited to the intrigue with Elizabeth Vernon.

By § 67 matters, so far from mending, have got worse: he is endangering character and reputation by the undesirable company, whose meretricious flatteries should be

<sup>1</sup> These are all accessible in Stopes, *Third Earl of Southampton*, pp. 55, 56-8, 137-8.

beneath his notice: and the personal accent in the sonnet is emphasised by the insistent 'he, him, his' which recur in almost every line.

### SONNET § 70

To critics of various schools, the lines

Thou present'st a pure unstained prime . . .

read like a flagrant contradiction to the Sonnets themselves; and they fall back on theories of dramatic invention, or of vicarious composition, or of alien authorship or destination. Such comments are an entire misreading of Shakespeare's outlook on questions of sexual morality. Neither in Plays nor Poems does he inculcate a code of personal chastity, foreign to the society and fashions in which he moved.<sup>1</sup> Scandal had been busy with his friend's indiscretions: and the lines are a courtly congratulation on having emerged unscathed from entanglements that beset his youth and threatened his prospects and career. The congratulations themselves repeat the note of warning sounded in the preceding sonnet.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 104, and Fort's note *in loc.*

## CHAPTER VIII—RAPE OF LUCRECE

### DATE AND TREATMENT—LITERARY LINKS—ALLEGORICAL AND MORAL PURPORT

THE Section of the Sonnets just considered abounds in verbal parallels with *Lucrece*, first registered anonymously on May 9, 1594. The poem is a new departure fulfilling the pledge expressed in the Dedication to *Venus and Adonis*, a conscious and elaborated work of art, applied to the production of narrative verse. For the experiment he chose a familiar tale, again using Ovid (with touches from Livy) as his primary source, but enriching the pattern with reminiscences from Chaucer in his *Legend of Good Women*, Section V., from Paynter, *Palace of Pleasure*, and others who had handled the twice-told tale. For metre he adopted the seven-line 'Rime Royal' stanza, which Chaucer had so triumphantly naturalised in *Troilus and Criseyde*. But the attempt to improve upon his models diverted him to false trails. The simplicity, the movement, and the sincerity essential to good narrative, are overlaid and smothered by decorative adjuncts.

As in Elizabethan romance (or novel), conceits, digressions and allusive illustrations impede the plot, and emasculate the pathos. A promising start is soon marred by sophisticated conceits, which as the poem proceeds become

more and more far-fetched and distracting. The flickering torch (*l.* 176-82 and 310-14), the grating locks and doors (*l.* 302-8), the voices of the night-weasel and owl, help to give atmosphere, but as the crisis approaches, the pathetic fallacies ascribed to the needle (*l.* 319-22), the hair (*l.* 400), the eyes (*l.* 379), the pillow (*l.* 387-90) of the victim, distract the flow of sympathy, while the elaborate heraldic conceits (*l.* 56-72, 204-8, 535-6), so alien to the time and place, hinder the play of pity and terror. At this point dramatic methods supersede descriptive

Her modèst eloquence with sighs is mixed  
Which to her oratory adds more grace,  
She puts the period often from his place. . . . *l.* 563-5.

Upon the stage, rhetoric might be effective: in narrative, it damps the heat of action and the sense of helplessness. And there is worse to follow. After the outrage, under the shattering sense of shame and dishonour, Lucretia delivers her apostrophe to Night (*l.* 764-805), followed by still more rhetorical addresses to Time and Opportunity (*l.* 874-1029), and a little later by the full-length description and analysis of the wall-painting depicting the fall of Troy (*l.* 1356-1568). These are opportunities for poetic invention and display,<sup>1</sup> but as soliloquies, in spite of noble lines such as *l.* 1493-4

For sorrow, like a heavy hanging bell,  
Once set on ringing, with his own weight goes

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<sup>1</sup> It is in this part of the poem that oxymora, alliterative lines, and reiterative stanzas most abound—*e.g.* in Stanzas 127, 128, 132, 135-7, 141-2, 147.



they become intolerable: they need another setting, and are the outcome of extraneous impulses. Here, if anywhere, *aliquid sufflaminandum erat*.

But our present concern lies not with literary appreciations, so much as with the personal motives and influences, which determined choice of subject and mode of treatment—and for this the Sonnets offer guiding clues. To realise how close and intimate the relation is, personal study is indispensable; but a few outstanding illustrations should be enough to dissipate demurs. ‘The niggard prodigal . . .’ of *Lucr.* 79 has appeared in the ‘Mak’st waste in niggarding’ of Son. § 1, the Narcissus and Self-love simile of *Lucr.* 265 in Son. § 3. Among the most convincing verbal echoes may be cited

Virtue would stain that Or with silver white      *l.* 56.

compared with

‘Or silvered o’er with white’ S. § 12. 4;

The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing      *l.* 871.  
with

Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang      S. 73. 4.

Or again, in the apostrophe to Time,

To ruinate proud buildings with thy hours  
And smear with dust the glittering golden towers      *l.* 943-4.

with

Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate

and

Unswapt stone besmeared with sluttish time.      S. § 55. 4.

It would be easy to multiply noticeable parallels.

The face that map which deep impressions bears  
l. 1710, and cf. 402.  
 compared with

His cheek the map of days outworn Son. § 68. 1;  
 Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers l. 870.  
 with

To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds S. § 69. 12.  
 and

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds § 94. 14  
 and

Sorrow like a heavy hanging bell l. 1493  
 compared with

. . . hear the surly sullen bell S. § 71. 2.

Coincidences in vocabulary are too numerous to quote: a few of the most arresting occur under the words *accessary*, *arrest*, *attaint*, *chops and wrinkles*, *Crow*, *heinous*, *intituled*, *jade*, *map*, *stell'd*, *suggest*, *testy*. And it deserves notice that the correspondences in the main belong to what may be called the third and middle Group of Sonnets, in which § 26 might almost serve as prologue to the *Lucrece*, and the lines

Till whatsoever star that guides my moving  
 Points on me graciously with fair aspect

recall the opening phrase of *Lucrece*

Where mortal stars, as bright as heaven's beauties,  
 With pure aspects did him peculiar duties l. 13-14.

and the use of 'beauties' is characteristic, as in Son. § 12. 11, 77. 1, 131. 2. One other link deserves more detailed comparison—that which connects *V.A.*, *Lucrece* and the

Sonnets with the *What Cunning can Express* lyric contributed by the Earl of Oxford to the *Phœnix Nest* (and later to *England's Helicon*), in 1593. It runs thus—

What cunning can express  
The favour of her face?  
To whom in this distress,  
I do appeal for grace.  
A thousand Cupids fly  
About her gentle eye.

From which each throws a dart,  
That kindleth soft sweet fire :  
Within my sighing heart,  
Possessèd by Desire.  
No sweeter life I try,  
Than in her love to die.

The lily in the field,  
That glories in his white,  
For pureness now must yield,  
And render up his right ;  
Heaven pictured in her face,  
Doth promise joy and grace.

Fair Cynthia's silver light,  
That beats on running streams,  
Compares not with her white,  
Whose hairs are all sunbeams ;  
So bright my Nymph doth shine,  
As day unto my eyne.

With this there is a red,  
Exceeds the Damask-Rose ;  
Which in her cheeks is spread,  
Whence every favour grows.  
In sky there is no star,  
But she surmounts it far.

When Phœbus from the bed  
 Of Thetis doth arise,  
 The morning blushing red,  
   In fair carnation wise;  
 He shows in my Nymph's face,  
 As Queen of every grace.

This pleasant lily white,  
   This taint of roseate red;  
 This Cynthia's silver light,  
   This sweet fair Dea spread;  
 These sunbeams in mine eye,  
 These beauties make me die.

The poem is full of Shakespearean turns, but we may restrict ourselves to those that recur in *V.A.*, *Lucrece* and the Sonnets.

In Stanzas 3 and 5-7 the main motive of comparison turns on the contrasts of white and red, of Lily and Rose in the face of the beloved. That they are a commonplace of sonneteers is true, but no one can fail to recognise the traits of treatment which link them with

the clear unmatched red and white  
 which triumphed in that sky of his delight

*Lucr.* 11-12.

where the second line finds its counterpart in

In sky there is no star  
 But she surmounts it far.

*l.* 29-30.

The contrast is further elaborated in heraldic terms and tinctures, in the lines 52-65, which close with

This Heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen  
 Argued by Beauty's red and Virtue's white.

From that it passes, just as in the lyric, to

The silent war of Lilies and of Roses  
Which Tarquin view'd in her fair face's field

and so again in *Lucr.* 258-9 her cheeks are

First red as Roses that on lawn we lay,  
Then white as lawn, the Roses took away<sup>1</sup>

and in *Lucr.* 386.

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under.

The 'Damask-Rose' in particular recalls

Gloves as sweet as damask roses

*Wint. Tale* IV. iii. 232 in the song of Autolycus, and  
reappears in Sonnet § 130.

I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.

The other outstanding simile, 'Fair Cynthia's silver light'<sup>2</sup> (*l.* 19 and 39), finds equally close reproduction in *Venus and Adonis*, *l.* 728

Cynthia obscures her silver shine

and 'The silver-shining Queen' of Night in *Lucr.* 786.

Desire,' for the Love-longing, is characteristic of the Poems, as may be seen in *V.A.* 720, 773, *Lucr.* 702-12; 'eyne' is similarly rhymed in *V.A.* 633; and turn after turn like

'Whose hairs are all sunbeams'

'These sunbeams in mine eye  
These beauties make me die'

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<sup>1</sup> For the same contrast, see *V.A.* 590. 'Like lawn spread upon the blushing rose.'

<sup>2</sup> See p. 58.

might be illustrated from the Poems and Plays, if it were possible to drive home appreciation of style by enumeration of instances. But in fine, to those who are inclined to deride or belittle the Earl of Oxford's gift for verse, one may fairly address a challenge to produce from contemporary Anthologies any lyric more Shakespearean than this in diction or in note.

To return to the motives which inspired the *Lucrece*. In the first place he redeems the vow to which the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* had pledged him. The 'first heir of invention' met with instant and brilliant acclaim. It was a spur to poetic ambition, and to that self-conceit which is almost part of the artistic and creative temperament. In the Earl of Oxford it was a conspicuous trait of character; in Wm. Shakspeare, so far as the argument from silence goes, it was as conspicuously absent. And he devoted to the work 'the graver labour' promised, without stint. In the Argument prefixed, in the consultation of authorities both for the story and the Troy scene, in arts of rhetoric and composition, in the multiplication of proverbs and allusions, marks of studied execution everywhere abound. The poem indeed suffers from excess of technique, and its completion within a twelvemonth is a feat of rapid workmanship.

In speeding the task he was spurred on by an eager and even passionate desire to commend himself and his devotion to the youth to whom he dedicates the work. At this stage, before he had plunged into public affairs, and entangled himself in the schemes and enterprises of the Earl of Essex, 'the world's hopeful expectation'—to quote the

*V.A.* Dedication—hinged mainly on the laurels which the young Earl had gained at the University of Cambridge, and on his appreciation of literature and the arts.<sup>1</sup> Rising poets in search of a patron—Barnabe Barnes, Thos. Nashe, Gervase Markham among them—hastened to woo his favour by sonnets, poems, and epistles dedicatory. For those who are not conversant with this class of literature, it will be an instructive exercise to compare Barnabe Barnes' sonnet in *Parthenophil and Parthenope* (1593), or Nashe's Dedicatory epistle in *Jack Wilton*, with the dignified reserve of the foreword to *Venus*, and the intimate regard of that to *Lucrece*. Barnes opens with

Receive (sweet Lord), with thy thrice sacred hande  
Which sacred Muses make their instrument. . . .

and Nashe indulges in such rodomontade as 'Unreprievably perisheth that book whatsoever to wast paper which on the diamond rock of your judgement, disasterly chanceth to be shipwrackt.' In his much more discreditable *Choice of Valentines*, the Prologue addressed to Southampton begins

Pardon, sweete flower of matchless Poetrie  
And fairest bud the red rose ever bore.

In both of these works Nashe appears to pit his Muse against that of the *Venus and Adonis*; but on flatulent panegyrics of this kind the Earl of Southampton had the good sense to turn his back, and also to withhold from the public eye his own youthful experiments in verse. Yet, whatever their blemishes, they at least bear witness to the genuine appreciation which Southampton felt for poetry and the decorative arts. The author of *Lucrece* realised

<sup>1</sup> See Phil. Stringer's *Latin Elegiacs*, quoted by Stopes, p. 50.

that here lay one approach to his esteem and admiration, and spared no pains to prove that in this field he could hold the lists against all comers. On most of these he could afford to look down with secure, if somewhat sensitive, disdain (Son. § 78).

But in the Sonnets there emerges one rival, whose gifts of learning, fancy, poetic pitch and power, might endanger his own title to first place in the Earl of Southampton's esteem. Study of Sonnet § 21,<sup>1</sup> and those allied to it, will supply reasons, that seem conclusive, for identifying this rival with Geo. Chapman. And anticipating that conclusion, it is well to ask what bearing, if any, it has on the contents and handling of *Lucrece*. In the choice of a Classical subject, in the highly-wrought description of the tapestried siege of Troy, in the insistent dwelling upon Night, and the rhetorical arraignment of Time and Opportunity, he seems to be challenging his rival on his own ground. Nowhere else are the classical references (Greek and Latin) checked with the same attention to detail. And in the conduct of the poem no reader can fail to be impressed with the recurrent emphasis laid on the sinister voices and suggestions of

Sable Night, mother of dread and fear      l. 117.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries      l. 165.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Night-wandering weasels shriek to see him there.      l. 307.

These are, no doubt, employed to create atmosphere; but after the crime has been committed, Night is arraigned as

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 87-8.



the guilty author and accomplice of evil-doing in stanzas such as

O comfort-killing Night, image of Hell !  
 Dim register and notary of shame !  
 Black stage for tragedies and murders fell !  
 Vast sin-concealing Chaos ! nurse of blame !  
 Blind muffled bawd ! dark harbour for defame !  
 Grim cave of death ! whisp'ring conspirator  
 With close-tongu'd treason and the ravisher !  
l. 764-70.

while such strained conceits are introduced as

Were Tarquin Night, as he is but Night's child,  
 The Silver-shining Queen he would distain ;  
 Her twinkling handmaids too, by him defiled,  
 Through Night's black bosom should not peep again.  
l. 785-8.

Just at this time 'The Schoole of Night,' referred to in *Love's Lab. Lost* IV. 3. 255, enjoyed a temporary vogue, and seems to have originated with Chapman's early ventures in poetry, particularly *The Shadow of Night*, which reached publication in 1594, containing the *Hymnus in Noctem* and *Hymnus in Cynthia*, shortly followed by *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (published in 1595). This special line of poetry, on which he was founding a reputation, may well have influenced the composition of *Lucrece*; and the subsequent apostrophes to Time and Opportunity, which so overload the poem with rhetoric (l. 925-1029), reflect to some extent the hysterical and distracting metaphors which we associate with Chapman's early Muse. These stanzas, it may be noted, contain not a few echoes of the terms and figures utilised in the Sonnets—for instance in l. 944-5

To *ruinate* proud buildings *with thy hours*,  
And *smear with dust* their glittering golden towers

compared with Son. § 10. 7, and § 55. 4; or

Let ghastly shadows his lewd eyes affright l. 971.

compared with Son. § 27. 10–11; or the protestations against ‘injurious,’ ‘wasteful,’ ‘devouring’ Time in Son. § 15. 16. 19, and many more.

So much for treatment and composition. Compared with *Venus and Adonis* the *Lucrece* attained only limited success, and a second edition was not called for till 1598: it was an experiment, not really congenial to the author’s true vein, and not repeated. Attributed to Wm. Shakspeare the actor, the classical background, the literary and allusive parallels and digressions,<sup>1</sup> and above all the terms of dedication, are part of an insoluble enigma, and defy plausible or even rational explanation.

This is no less true of the turn given to the tale, and the underlying intention which it suggests. On the basis of Edward de Vere authorship, a natural explanation is at once forthcoming. The poem is a well-chosen parable, that gave favourable openings for the display of poetic gift, and also for the conveyance of personal reflections and concern. As in *Venus and Adonis* psychological interest was concentrated on Adonis, so too in *Lucrece* (as compared with the Ovidian or other renderings) the centre of interest lies not in the chastity and heroism of Lucretia, but

<sup>1</sup> It is claimed that the Troy scenes elaborated in the tapestry (*Lucr.* 1366–1567) are based on the Giulio Romano fresco at Mantua, which occupies so conspicuous a place in the Plays, and which the Earl of Oxford visited during his 1575–6 Italian tour. See Sir E. Sullivan in *Nineteenth Century* for 1908 and 1918.

on the guilt of Tarquin, and the consequences it entailed. He is the villain of the piece; and in Knox Pooler's words, the aim of the poet is 'to exhibit the utter repulsiveness of Tarquin, whose debates and vacillations have neither the purpose not the effect of showing him as a weak man struggling against passion, or hesitating between good and evil, but bring into prominence, one by one, all the bonds that he must sunder before rushing on dishonour, and the least of these should have been enough to restrain him.' In the diagnosis of disgrace it is most instructive to note the direction and distribution of the moral emphasis. The arguments throughout are based upon *noblesse oblige*. The poem is no parable of chastity, in depreciation of sexual incontinence; the finger of reproof is lifted against the disregard of rival obligations—the violation of good faith and the ties of friendship (*l.* 231-7), the stain on family or knightly honour, the breaches of the moral code incumbent upon given grades of rank and standing. The poet, Lucrece, Tarquin himself, measure disgrace in terms of heraldry (*l.* 55-72)—by abatements of honour, by the bar sinister (*l.* 204-6), by the blot upon the scutcheon, or indelible attain ( *l.* 828)

The shame that from them no device can take,  
The blemish that will never be forgot,  
Worse than a slavish wipe or birth-hour's blot. *l.* 535-7.

So again Lucrece adjures him to abstain from outrage

By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship's oath. *l.* 569.

Treason to friendship and to knightly devoir is the depth of degradation, and stanzas are devoted to the theme, that rank and station are not an excuse for licence, but a measure

of responsibility and a curb upon desire. (l. 601 vv., 652-663, 852, etc.)

Two quotations may be taken as representative

For princes are the glass, the school, the book,  
Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look. l. 615-6.

and

The mightier man, the mightier is the thing  
That makes him honour'd or begets him hate;  
For greatest scandal waits on greatest state. l. 1004-6.

Throughout the Sonnets the appeal runs on parallel lines. Like Tarquin, the recipient of *Lucrece* and the Sonnets is tempted to the gratification of each desire that beauty, birth and wealth engender, and to which Court ways and morals held out such alluring baits (§ 37. 41). As he goes on his way through 'the ambush of young days' (§ 70), beset with open challenges and insidious perils, his shield and safeguard lay in that *noblesse oblige*, on which the *Lucrece* lays such stress. The poetry of intimate and personal approach does not allow the freedoms proper to all forms of epideictic verse, and the writer is careful not to overstep the bounds of privileged reserve and tact. But there too the appeal is strictly parallel; the motive urged is not that of personal purity, but of self-respect, of 'good report' (§ 36. 14), of compliance with the canons imposed by courtly demand and etiquette, of rising to the expectations and the level of his nobility (§ 37, § 69-70). 'The strong offence,' which called for indignation and rebuke (§ 34-36, 133), lay in that very treason to knightly troth and defiance of the social code, which brought the proud house of Tarquin crashing to the ground.

One more distinctive trait deserves notice; though its

interest lies chiefly in the light thrown on unity of authorship and of temperamental strain. In *Lucrece* a stanza is devoted to the spasm of physical revolt and self-disgust, which follows on the commission of the crime

He like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence ;  
 She like a wearied lamb lies panting there ;  
 He scowls, and hates himself for his offence  
 \* \* \* \* \*

She stays, exclaiming on the direful night ;  
 He runs, and chides his vanished, *loath'd delight*.

*l.* 736-742, cf. *l.* 707.

This same revulsion, the surfeit of physical desire—a very unusual note in literature—finds expression with something of neurotic intensity in Son. § 129, and with more restraint in § 141. 14; it is an unmistakable mark of personal experiences, which explain the jarring notes of rapture and repulsion, the strange amalgam of fascination and distrust, which characterise the poet's outlook upon women.<sup>1</sup>

In support of parabolic design it may be noted that nowhere else in the Plays or Poems is the reference to religious sanctions so explicit. Here and there in the Plays the religious note is introduced, in compliance with dramatic propriety; but the poet himself seems instinctively, or resolutely, to refrain from passing beyond the region of human impulses, desires, affections, in their mutual interplay. Of higher transcendental aims or ends there is no word; according to the old adage 'Character is destiny,' and neither from utterances of the chief actors, nor from

<sup>1</sup> So in *Posthumus*. See Harris, *The Man Shakespeare*, pp. 51-2.

comments of onlookers, is it possible to construct a formal theodicy, or any attempt 'to justify the ways of God to men.' With seeing and with sympathetic eye the poet divines the tragedies and comedies that result from contrasts of temperament, from conflicts of will, from love of kind, or from 'man's inhumanity to man,' but he seldom if ever relates these to ulterior ends or sanctions, or attaches to misconduct the sense of sin. This makes it the more remarkable that, departing from his habitual practice, he should introduce into the incongruous surroundings of the *Lucrece* the language and ethics of Christian belief—such as

The soul's fair temple is defaced l. 719.

and the surfeit of *lust* revealing itself as Sin—

And then with lank and lean discolour'd cheek,  
With heavy eye, knit brow, and strengthless pace,  
Feeble Desire, all recreant, poor, and meek,  
Like to a bankrupt beggar wails his case :  
The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace,  
For there it revels ; and when that decays,  
The guilty rebel for remission prays. l. 708-14.

Sin is the lurking enemy that lies in wait for the unwary

Sin ne'er gives a fee ;  
He gratis comes, and thou art well apaid. l. 913-14.

and so in the apostrophe to Opportunity

In thy shady cell, where none may spy him,  
Sits Sin, to seize the souls that wander by him. l. 881-2.

We may go further and say that the doctrines of Sin, Grace and Absolution, are handled in terms of Catholic rather than Puritan teaching—for instance

The blackest sin is clear'd with absolution. l. 354.

This type of language is so unaccustomed—may one not say unparalleled?—in Shakespeare, that it must belong to the special character of the poem, and to its personal intention; and it will be remembered that Southampton, in his early days, was brought up on the lines of Catholic tradition, and that in family connexions, and even by actual profession, the Earl of Oxford was closely associated with the leading Catholic aristocrats of the day. Indications of personal religion are conspicuous by absence, but this is the kind of handling we might expect in any dealing with the doctrines of Grace.

It is needless to dilate further on the close links—verbal, literary and temperamental—which connect *Lucrece* with the Sonnets. But it is important to notice the range within which correspondences occur. The *Lucrece* contains not a few reminiscences of the *V.A.* and the earlier Sonnets, but beyond that the notable correspondences suggesting more or less contemporaneous composition, are contained in the main body of the Sonnets extending from § 26 to § 74, and find little or no place in those of later date.

## CHAPTER IX—PERSONALITY

### TRAITS AND TEMPERAMENT—MELANCHOLIA : LOSS OF GOOD NAME

BETWEEN the dedication of *Venus and Adonis*, and that of *Lucrece*, a marked difference of tone and sentiment occurs. The former voices sincere and cordial admiration, but without any suggestion of personal intimacy. That of *Lucrece* is in an entirely new key. ‘The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end.’ ‘What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours.’ It is no conventional dedication: there is nothing fulsome in the terms; but it would be hard to find anywhere a pledge of more complete and unconventional devotion, and the Sonnets are the redemption of the pledge. The earliest go no further than sympathetic, though of its kind enthusiastic, admiration: except the tentative ‘for love of me’ in § 10. 13, no note of personal endearment occurs before § 13. The transition belongs to the interval that separates the two dedications, the latter half of the year 1593. So far as we have evidence, the year is of no special moment in the life of Wm. Shakspeare. In that of Edward de Vere, on the other hand, it marks a climacteric. In February of that year, as the fruit of his second marriage, a son and heir was born, Henry, who in 1604 succeeded to the title. In this same year he finally



transferred what remained of the Castle Hedingham estates into trust for his daughters, marking the surrender of public ambitions, permanent withdrawal into the seclusion of private life, and preoccupation, so far as direct evidence goes, with literary activities.

Throughout the Sonnets the same mind is at work, a mind of many facets, moulded by crucial conflicts of experience. There—not in formal unities of subject, time, scheme or plot—lies the unifying bond, the personality of the author, as affected by terms of intercourse with a single recipient, under constantly varying conditions. He writes as one who in youth had tasted the zest imparted to life by birth and wealth, by physical alacrity and skill, by the excitements of hawking, hunting, and field sports in which

every humour hath his adjunct pleasure  
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest.     § 91. 5-6.

He had sensed 'the spirit of youth in everything' (§ 98. 3): he had known the lures of fashion, the glitter of jewels and robes (§ 48. 91), the smiles and frowns of princes (§ 25), the gilded shows and masked deformities (§ 66) of Court life, caprice and fashion.

Psychological reactions teem with surprises, and surmise is risky and misleading. But through the chequered ups and downs of personal relationship reflected in the Sonnets, we descry a temperament sensitive, high-strung, intense, swayed by conflicting impulses and humours, elate and downcast to extremes, self-absorbed yet renouncing, insatiate and profuse, and therefore at once jealous in affections and generous in forgiving, a complex such as Elizabethans sought to connote under the term

Melancholia,<sup>1</sup> which Shakespeare analyses in the lips of Jaques, and dramatises in the person of Hamlet. It is no synonym for hypochondriac gloom. It belongs to spirits proud and sensitive, which, through defects of quality, or the untowardness of fortune (14. 5, 25. 1-3, 29. 1, 37. 3, 90. 3. 12, 111. 1), have been subjected to misadventures and rebuffs, and failed to make good in life. Refined and heightened sensibilities induce poignant and intense reactions; but rather than harp on grievances or own defeat, they take shelter under tongue-tied reserve, or veins of irony seasoned with humour, or the 'misery, that makes sport to mock itself.' As the Duke says of Jaques (*A.Y.L.I.* II. i. 67)

I love to cope him in these sullen fits,  
For then he's full of matter.

*Melancholia* in the Sonnets has reached its autumnal phase. Already at the outset we feel the personal touch in § 12. 5-8

When lofty trees I see barren of leaves  
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
And summer's green, all girded up in sheaves,  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard

and sunset or autumn tints give their colouring to the most mellow among the Sonnets (e.g. § 33. 73. 97. and 104) till they yield to the funeral notes, which toll the approaching end. They represent accepted failures, due in part

<sup>1</sup> So in Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*. For delicate psychological analysis, see Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 110 pp., and *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 321-5. For wider ranges of phase in Biron, Romeo, Richard II, Richard III, Antonio, Macbeth, Brutus, see Connes, *The Shakespeare Mystery*, pp. 118-28, and F. Harris, *The Man Shakespeare*.

to personal defects (36. 10), but more to adverse circumstances. The note throughout is retrospective and defeatist. His radiant morn had been early overcast by clouds, gathering toward 'the ugly rack' of his decline. His experience, as outlined in the Sonnets § 25. 29. 36. 66, may be summarised in the terms of Hamlet's soliloquy —

The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes. *H. III. i. 70.*

Hopes of Court favour or reinstatement are now foreclosed (§ 25. 1-3); he has retired from the lists, and writes as one down and out, who has accepted defeat.<sup>1</sup> The friends of youth have passed into 'death's dateless night' (§ 30. 6), and his new affection is the reminder, the resuscitation as it were, of buried hopes

Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,  
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone. § 31. 8-9.

For himself he will no longer strive nor cry. Reverses have tamed his natural pride. With physical activities crippled (§ 37. 3, 63. 2, 74. 11, 89), with shattered health and enfeebled spirits (§ 27-8, 43, 61), he withdraws from a struggle to which he is no longer equal (§ 66. 1. 13), and with something of resentful disdain (29. 14), wrongfully disgraced (§ 66. 7), he accepts the social detractions and tabus, which treat association with him as a stain and a reproach.<sup>2</sup> This vein of thought is so recurrent, it occurs in such different contexts, and at such intervals of

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 70, 76-8.

<sup>2</sup> See § 36, 3. 9-12, and the enumeration in § 66, with which compare § 71. 14, 72. 12, and in a somewhat different vein § 110. 1-4, 111. 1-5, 112.

time, that it may be regarded as a fixed habit of mind, amounting almost to an obsession. But different contexts seem to convey different suggestions, and it will be worth while to submit them in advance to closer scrutiny, to note the specific differences, and see how far they fall in with the known facts and incidents of Edward de Vere's career. The earlier expressions, such as those in § 14, 25. 1-3, 36, are all in the vein of § 29

When, in disgrace *with fortune* and *men's eyes*,  
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate.

They ascribe his overthrow to the perversity of fortune, and more specifically to the assaults of envy, malice and intrigue, which tainted the whole atmosphere of Court life, as delineated in § 66. They are a more subdued expression of the violent outburst on *The Loss of Good Name*, which was contributed by E. O. to *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576). There 'the shock of shame and infamy,' which foreboded life-long disaster and discredit, referred to the reckless dissipation of inherited fortune and estates, and still more to scandals set on foot about his doings and dealings on the Continent. These did indeed do much to prejudice his prospects, and wreck his future career; but they might have been outlived, and can hardly be the theme of Sonnets written nearly twenty years later. In the interim he had regained royal favour, and held positions of trust, and when he writes of

blots that do with me remain  
and of

bewailèd guilt that would do thee shame § 36. 3. 10.

or later

Of faults concealed, wherein I am attainted § 88. 7.

and accepts the position of a social pariah, with whom a man of character and standing could not associate or even remain on bowing terms (§ 89. 8-9) without danger to his good repute, he must refer to scandals more heinous and more recent than youthful misdemeanours or extravagances, however reckless; and one's thoughts turn rather to charges, true or false, with which his mortal enemies, the Howard-Arundel ring of conspirators, endeavoured, by blackening his character, to wreak their personal revenge. While still later Sonnets (§ 110, 111, 112) seem clearly to attribute his loss of social caste to vulgarising associations with the stage.

Upon the precise content and application of these various terms of dispraise interpretation is sure to differ; but the capital point is this, that not one of them seems congruous with the fortunate playwright, who was at this very time climbing the ladder of professional success, and still less with the prosperous tradesman, who was in 1596 incubating his transformation into William Shakespeare, Gentleman, of New Place, Stratford.<sup>1</sup> They form an acid test of orthodox belief, hard to explain, still harder to explain away, except as products of inventive fancy, or commissioned for extraneous ends. They do not read like either; while, as addressed by the Earl of Oxford to Southampton, they fit naturally into place.

<sup>1</sup> The year of the grant of Arms to John Shakespeare.

## CHAPTER X—SONNETS § 71-86

### DISHEARTENMENT: THE RIVAL POET

WITH § 71 a change of mood, if not an interval of time, supervenes. Spirits and health had been affected by the recurrence of distressing symptoms, and Sonnets § 71-4, which contain some of the most perfect lines in the Sonnets, are written under some apprehension of approaching death.

The coward conquest of a wretch's knife    § 74. 11.

I take to be an unmistakable reference to disabling injuries received in the duel (1582) with Sir Thos. Knyvet, from the effects of which he never wholly recovered—

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie.    § 73. 10.

The hours of weakness quickened the sense of dependence on his friend's affection, and the desire to kindle sympathetic response; and nowhere is freer rein given to the touch of self-pity, and of sentiment in the affections. It seems clear, particularly from § 75, that by this time opportunities for personal intercourse had been re-established, and the gift or gifts referred to in § 77 point to the same conclusion.

That at this stage the writer was engrossed in poetic composition, and sensitively eager for appreciation, is

plain from § 59 onwards, and is what we should expect from one 'in labour' with the *Lucrece*.

How are our brains beguiled<sup>1</sup>  
Which, labouring for invention, bear amiss  
The second burthen of a former child !     § 59. 2-4.

It is tempting to refer the figure used specifically to the *Lucrece*, following upon 'the first heir of his invention,' the *Venus and Adonis*. If so, it is plain that the author himself was dissatisfied with the results of his second labour, which saw the light in 1594. It is a useful aid to the date of composition.

Over the Sonnets themselves he spared no pains; they were no mere diversions of leisure moments. In structure and expression none is more finished than § 73

That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

On one side they were his bid for immortality; on another, the medium through which he strove to win and hold his friend's affections; and this adds reality and depth to sonnets that seem otherwise to lack point or motive—those of which Hazlitt could 'make neither head nor

<sup>1</sup> Compare the 'deep-brain'd Sonnets' of *Lover's Complaint*, 209: and also § 76, 81, 82, etc.

tail.' In default of the true clue, Robertson describes § 38 as 'weak and unmasculine,' and holds that § 59 cannot be personal. In point of fact, traces of careless or hasty workmanship in the Sonnets are singularly few, though in some (never intended for publication) the lighter vein of occasional verse, of humorous or sardonic banter, finds passing vent; of this there is no better instance than § 76. Read as a sample of poetic invention, it has little or no point. As a playful sally from friend to friend, apologising for monotony of note, it is admirable, and the central place given to the play on his own name was a form of wit in which Shakespeare delighted; in the Sonnets he finds opportunities both in 'Chapman' (§ 21. 14) and 'Will' (§ 135, 136, 143). Any one who accepts (or even questions) the Earl of Oxford attribution, must admit the confirmation it receives from the characteristic *jeu d'esprit* on De Vere

Why write I *still all one*, EVER the *same*. . . .  
That E.VERY word doth almost tell my name? <sup>1</sup>

In the stanza of the Echo Verses, adapted in the *Venus and Adonis*, l. 829-33, he had used the same pleasantry.

Thus the echo answered her to *every word* she spoke,  
and elaborated it in the fourfold echo *Vere* or *Ver*, upon which the succeeding stanza is built,

<sup>1</sup> For other unquestionable instances of the name-play, by Chapman in his *Pro Vere Autumni Lachrymae* and others, see G. H. Rendall, p. 210-2 on § 76. With P. Allen, e.g. in *Oxf. Sh. Case Corroborated*, pp. 181-5, 195, *Life Story of E. de Vere*, pp. 314, 327, 363, *Plays of Shaks. and Chapman*, p. 310, and elsewhere, it becomes an obsession.



*An Vanefors*[= Ann Varasour's] *Eccho*.

Oh heavens! who was the first that bred in me this feavere  
Vere (Ver)

Who was the first that gave the wound whose fear I wear for  
*evere*? Vere.

What tyrant, Cupid, to my harm usurps thy golden *quivere*?  
Vere.

What wight first caught this heart and can from bondage it  
*delivere*? Vere.

The lines, as we have seen, are a demonstration<sup>1</sup> that the Earl of Oxford was the author of *Venus and Adonis*, and consequently of the Sonnets.

### SONNETS § 78-86

Sonnets § 78-86 are mainly concerned with the fear that his own poetic efforts (in the Sonnets) might suffer in his friend's esteem by comparison with those of a more ambitious rival. The fear is characteristic of the decade in which poetic rivalries—Sonneteering and Dramatic—became acutely sensitive. Among the literary circles of the day poetic badinage and praise were rife, couched

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 60-1; Looney, *Poems of E. de Vere*, pp. lxxiii-iv, and p. 2-3; Ward, *Seventeenth Earl*, p. 228. Apropos of plays on names, a tentative suggestion may be added. Commentators have called attention to the iteration of 'Rose' in the Sonnets, and at the first mention in § 1. 2 *Rose* is italicised in Q., and again capitalised in § 109. 14 and elsewhere. It has the countenance of *Hamlet* III. i. 160 'the expectancy and rose of the fair state'—but may it not in part be due to a play on Rose-ley as the equivalent of *Wriothesley*? 'Save thou, my Rose, in it thou art my all' looks like it; for the conjunction of 'my Rose' with the *Wriothesley* motto *Tout pour ung* can hardly be accidental coincidence: and this may underlie the 'still all one, Ever the Same' of the Sonnet § 76 we are considering.

mostly in allusive terms, as may be seen later in the Hall and Marston *Satires*, in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, in the *Return from Parnassus*, and similar *jeux d'esprit*. In such contests of wit much that was clear to contemporaries is dark to us, but in this case there seems no reasonable doubt that the rival in view is Chapman.<sup>1</sup> In Son. § 21 *The Amorous Zodiac* had been subjected to playful parody; and Son. § 86 pours scorn upon the absurd pretensions put forward in *The Shadow of Night* (1594), and *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (1595). For the former Chapman chose for his motto *Versus mei habebunt aliquantum Noctis*, and in his Prefatory dedication declared that the Muse must be approached 'with invocation, fasting, watching; yea not without having drops of their souls like an heavenly familiar.' And in his *Hymn to Night* avers

No pen can anything eternal write  
That is not steep'd in humour of the Night l. 447-8.

with much more of the same kind.<sup>2</sup> The *Banquet of Sense* was his poetic critique upon the *Venus and Adonis*, in which, with verbose frigidity unrivalled except in his own productions, he illustrates the correct method of handling such a theme, and closes the appended *Coronet* with lines that deliberately recall Green's outburst against 'the upstart Crow beautified with our feathers,' followed by strictures that contrast his own fidelity to Academic models with the lawless pranks and licence of the Shakespearean drama.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 87-92.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Truth dwells in gulfs, whose deeps hide shades so rich  
That Night sits muffled there in clouds of pitch.

Ep. Dedic. to *Odyssey*.

Never shall my friendless verse envy  
Muses that Fame's loose feathers beautify.

Muses that Fame's loose feathers beautify,  
And such as scorn to tread the theatre,  
As ignorant : the seed of memory  
Have most inspired, and shown their glories there  
To noblest wits, and men of highest doom,  
That for the kingly laurel bent affair  
The theatres of Athens and of Rome,  
Have been the crowns and not the base impair.

Such, in the briefest possible terms,<sup>1</sup> is the background which underlies the ironies of Son. § 86, as well as the elaborated caricatures of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Was it *his spirit*, by *spirits taught to write*  
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead ?  
No, neither he nor *his compeers by night*  
Giving him aid, my verse astonished.  
He, nor that *affable familiar ghost*  
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,  
As victors of my silence cannot boast ;  
*I was not sick of any fear from thence.* § 86. 5-12.

The words, it will be noted, are retrospective, and in a vein half-scornful half-amused deride the high-flown bombast burlesqued in the Play. But already in *Hero and Leander*, and still more in his *Iliads*, which were already under way, Chapman was bending his energies to achievements, which have proved his more enduring title to fame, and which later claimed the patronage (among others)

<sup>1</sup> For these intricate connexions, the student may turn to Acheson, *Rival Poet and Shakespeare Sonnet Story*; Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman*; Allen, *Shakespeare and Chapman*; and the Introduction to the Cambridge Edition of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

of 'The Right Valorous and Virtuous Lord, the Earl of Southampton.' It is to these that I refer the generous appreciation of § 80, 5-8:

But since your worth, wide as the ocean is,  
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,  
My saucy bark inferior far to his  
On your broad main doth wilfully appear

and the opening couplet of § 86

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse  
Bound for the prize of all-too precious you?

The figures employed<sup>1</sup> breathe the genius of English patriotism, and are redolent of the memorable days, during which the writer and his *Edward Bonaventura* played their part, when on the 'broad main' of the English Channel and the North Sea, Drake and his 'saucy barks' chased and worried to death the stately galleons of the Invincible Armada.

Shakespeare and Chapman moved on opposite wings of the Renaissance advance—the Romantic and the Academic—and their objectives lay far apart. But it is pleasant to reflect that, notwithstanding their interchange of flouts and gibes, each left on record<sup>2</sup> a tribute of unfeigned and generous admiration for the other's gifts.

<sup>1</sup> 'He of tall building and of goodly pride' (§ 80. 12) reads like a reflection of *Hero and Leander* i. 225 :

A stately-built ship, well rigg'd and tall,  
The ocean maketh more majestic.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 6-7.

## CHAPTER XI—SONNETS § 71-106

### POETIC DEVOIR—FRIENDSHIP UNDER STRAIN: ESTRANGEMENT AND REMONSTRANCE—SPENSER LINKS

THE concern which he felt for the just appreciation of his verses reflects a deeper discontent. Into them he had poured the best of his feelings and his powers, and to see them supplanted by the polished flatteries (§ 84. 14, 85—and compare § 83. 1-4) of a more voluble rival, was a last drop in the cup of bitterness.

Oh how I faint when I of you do write,  
Knowing a better spirit<sup>1</sup> doth use your name,  
And in the praise thereof spends all his might  
To make *me* tongue-tied, speaking of your fame.

§ 80. 1-4

Amid the wreck of other hopes and ambitions, this seemed to sound the knell of final defeat. True, there was no formal breach of promise, of any covenanted bond

I grant thou wert not married to my Muse,  
And therefore mayst without attaint o'erlook  
The dedicated words which writers use  
Of their fair subject blessing every book. § 82. 1-4.

But on his side at least there had been the proffer of a heart's devotion, building upon a like response, and supersession seemed to denude life of its last satisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* a more gifted genius; cf. 'that able spirit,' § 85. 7.

‘ For restful death I cry ’ (§ 66. 1.) becomes the burden of his song. But one thing at least he would leave behind him, his last bequest to the friend whose affections he had failed to hold—an immortalised renown.

Although in me each part will be forgotten.  
Your name from hence <sup>1</sup> immortal life shall have,  
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die :  
The earth can yield me but a common grave,  
When you entombèd in men’s eyes shall lie,  
Your monument shall be my gentle verse. . . .

§ 81. 4-9.

Sonnets § 71, 73, 74, 81 are among the most pathetic, in that self-belittling egoism, which is so pervading and distinctive a characteristic of the Sonnets. They are no feigned sentiment, but the authentic voice of a heart lamenting its own falls from grace. By some they are discarded, or explained away, as ‘ non-Shakespearean.’ It is no wonder. The words just quoted have a strange clairvoyance. For determination of authorship, it would be hard to devise a more pregnant test than the self-complacent bust at Stratford, in contrast with the unlettered grave at Hackney, and the monumental Wriothesley Tomb at Titchfield.<sup>2</sup>

But the rifts of estrangement went deeper than poetic or literary appreciation. At first the writer attributes them to wounded vanity (§ 83), to that fondness or desire of praise (§ 84. 14) in which other pens excel his own, and in which he cannot claim to be an adept (§ 85). This may be part of the truth, and is what might be expected of

<sup>1</sup> From these Sonnets.

<sup>2</sup> For illustrative details, consult Stopes, *Third Earl of Southampton*, pp. 6, 16, 465.

Southampton. But that between § 86 and § 87 some decisive break had occurred, is clear from the opening line of good-bye to friendship in

Farewell ! thou art too dear for my possessing § 87. 1.

The friend of whom he held, had given notice of termination of the lease—and in so doing was within his rights ! Sonnet § 88 accepts the verdict, with the same Stoic endurance as at the earlier default. With characteristic and yet sensitive hauteur, he is ready to bear the whole brunt of popular opprobrium.<sup>1</sup> No claims on personal friendship and loyalty, no calumnies, however misdirected, will induce him to do anything to prejudice the fortunes of one whose honour was dearer to him than his own.

With mine own weakness being best acquainted,  
Upon thy part <sup>2</sup> I can set down a story  
Of faults conceal'd, wherein I am attained.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Such is my love, to thee I so belong,  
That for *thy* right myself will bear all wrong.

§ 88. 5-7, 13-14.

And again in § 89. 5-7 :

Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill  
As I'll myself disgrace ; knowing thy will,  
I will acquaintance strangle and look strange.

He is at liberty to disclaim all ties of friendship in the past ; and that, indeed, will be better far than to keep up hollow and compromising pretences, which might serve as handles for subsequent recrimination. § 90 is one of the most deeply felt of all the Sonnets :

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Rendall, pp. 227-8.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* On thy side.

Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,  
 And do not drop in for an after-loss :  
 Ah, do not, when my heart hath 'scaped this sorrow,  
 Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe ;  
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,  
 To linger out a purposed overthrow.

The precise causes—personal, social, moral or political—on which the rupture turned, must remain uncertain.<sup>1</sup> Oxford's earlier career included many incidents, which gave rise to damaging scandals, public and private; Southampton was at this moment entangling himself in schemes and connexions, at which the son-in-law of Burleigh must have looked askance, and so far as possible kept aloof. From 1595, if not earlier, Southampton dropped out of favour at Court, and Sonnets § 88-90 point to association in some affair, or affairs, which had been visited with severe social or official reprobation.

#### SONNETS § 91-104—INTERRUPTED AND INTERMITTENT FRIENDSHIP

The following sonnets up to § 104, which reviews the triennium of friendship, contain no reference to specific incidents; they are for the most part wistful assurances, mixed with warning apprehensions (in § 95 and § 96), of devotion and affection constant to the past, yet aware how insecure is the ground on which it treads. Literary level and charm, for instance in § 97-8, 102, are remarkably well sustained. No sonnet gives more instinctive and poetic presentment of the aristocratic setting, in which the Sonnets are framed, than § 91.

<sup>1</sup> From this point onward, divergences between the Burleigh and the Essex factions became more and more pronounced.



Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,  
 Some in their wealth, some in their bodies' force;  
 Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill,  
 Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*

Thy love is better than high birth to me,  
 Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,  
 Of more delight than hawks or horses be;  
 And having thee, of all men's pride I boast.

§ 91. 1-4, 9-12.

To Edward de Vere the pride of birth, wealth and fashion, the cult of physical emulations and field sports, the thrills of hawking, hunting and horsemanship, were a birthright as cherished and instinctive as they were foreign to the antecedents and experiences of Wm. Shakspeare. At the tourney, he had carried off the first prize in 1571, in 1581, and 1584—on every occasion on which we hear of his competing—but more precious than all, was the bond of friendship which they had helped to create.

### SONNETS § 92-96

From the companion Sonnets § 92 and § 93 it is clear that Southampton was committing himself to courses which he could not approve, and yet was anxious still to retain his countenance. But mere outward smiles, without the reality of vital and sincere response, could give no satisfaction to one for whom withdrawal of affection and trust was nothing less than life or death. Alluring smiles designed to disarm criticism, were but the apple (§ 93. 13) with which Eve beguiled Adam to complicity in her own guilt. The sonnets which follow (§ 94-6) are explicit as to the direction which his apprehensions and his warnings took.

Some say thy 'fault' is youth, some 'wantonness';  
 Some say thy 'grace' is youth and 'gentle sport';  
 Both grace and fault are lov'd of more and less;  
 Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort. § 96. 1-4.

He warns him of the dangers he is incurring, and of the need for self-control (§ 94), amid the assaults to which youth and beauty are by their nature exposed. A passing 'infection' (§ 94. 10) may blight the future of the flower.

For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;  
 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.'

§ 94. 13-14.

The play in which the line occurs (*Edward III*, II. 1. 451), and in which Shakespeare is supposed to have had some hand, was entered on the Stationers' Register in December, 1595;<sup>1</sup> and the 'scarlet ornaments' of § 142. 6 is another echo from the same scene.

Whatever other incidents or rumours may be concerned, the date makes it pretty certain that a principal item in the gravamen lay in the attentions which the Earl of Southampton was pressing upon Elizabeth Vernon. After her father's death in 1591, the good offices of the Earl of Essex secured for his young cousin a place among the Maids of Honour to the Queen. From 1594 onwards Court gossip became busy with her name. 'My Lord of Southampton,' writes Rowland Whyte in September 1595, 'doth with too much familiarity courte the faire Mrs. Vernon.' But diffidence, prudence, and dread of the Queen's displeasure compelled her to stand on the defensive, and this is the position depicted in the Sonnet.

<sup>1</sup> Chambers, *Wm. Shakespeare*, i. 515. The 1596 Quarto advertises it as 'sundrie times plaied about the Citie of London.'

Of Southampton's own movements and doings after his coming of age in October 1594, details are very incomplete; and in this stratum of the Sonnets—more conventional in type than elsewhere—seasonal indications are almost the only clue to time-order. Sonnet § 97 points to late summer passing into autumn, Sonnet § 98 to May or later, while the 'forward violet' addressed in § 99 denotes early spring. In § 100. 3-7 the 'worthless song' and the 'lays,' repeated in § 102. 6, refer to the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, and relegate them to experiences belonging to the past, but do not help to more exact placing. Son. § 106, on the other hand, shows unmistakable connexion with *The Faerie Queene*, issued in 1596. Poetic manner and mimicry were congenial to the Elizabethan mind—sonneteer, dramatist or lyricist—and Shakespeare, as the Plays bear witness, conspicuously in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Hamlet*, delighted in parody. Just as in § 21 (or again § 130) he played with Chapman's affectations, so here he pays his tribute to the completed version of *The Faerie Queene*,<sup>1</sup> issued in 1596. The links between Spenser and the Earl of Oxford are numerous and unmistakable; in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) he trifled pleasantly with his juvenile Verse; in *The Teares of the Muses* (1591, or earlier) he deplored his withdrawal from the public eye; and in *The Faerie Queene*<sup>2</sup> the most personal among the Dedicatory Sonnets is addressed to the Earle of Oxenford, Lord High Chamberlayne of England. How far the poet redeemed his pledge, and consciously allegorised the Earl (like Sidney, Walsingham or Howard)

<sup>1</sup> For proofs, see G. H. Rendall, pp. 244-5.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted on p. 13.

as model for one or another of the Ideal Knights, is questionable; possibly the choice should fall on Cambell,<sup>1</sup> introduced in Book IV as linked with his rival Triamond in league of perfect and enduring friendship. And this would add special point to the tribute here paid to the poetic achievement presented to the world in 1596.

When in the chronicle of wasted time  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme  
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,  
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,  
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have expressed  
Even such a beauty as you master now.

The lines re-echo the opening Stanza of *The Faerie Queene*, and the tribute is addressed almost as much to Spenser as to the actual recipient.

<sup>1</sup> Another alternative is Sir Paridell in Book III. But Spenser's allegorical distillations are most volatile, and nowhere more so than in Books III and IV.

## CHAPTER XII

### TIME-SCHEME OF THE SONNETS

THIS seems an appropriate point for mapping a time-chart for the Sonnets as a whole, and for co-ordinating and reviewing the chief events—historical, biographical and literary—connected with their composition. It is a divide between the earlier groups which we have traversed and those which lie beyond. The starting-point is set by the close and intimate connexion of the opening Section (§ 1-17) with the *Venus and Adonis* issued in April 1593. That is the April 'when first your eye I eyed' (§ 104. 2), the start of personal acquaintance. The change of note and situation shown in the succeeding Section § 18-32, implies an interval, which cannot be strictly measured. But indications are not lacking. The marked seasonal implications, on which § 18 is built, suggest high summer, August or September of 1593. The 'first fine raptures' of idealising friendship, which with their 'eternising' sequel irradiate Sonnets § 18-32, belong to the latter part of 1593, and perhaps carry us into the opening months of 1594. This is the period to which we may assign the references to losses and reverses in the past (§ 30-31), to clouds and stigmas that darkened the present (§ 25, 29), and to the journey and absence from home (§ 27-8) which resulted in the catastrophe of § 33-42. The Chapman

pleasantry in § 21 forecasts, or greets, the appearance of *The Shadow of Night* in 1594.<sup>1</sup> By the outset of 1594, if not earlier, Southampton's addresses had turned in other directions, and on finally renouncing pretensions to his daughter Elizabeth's hand, he compensated the Earl with a very liberal donation,<sup>2</sup> which was, no doubt, treated as her dower; and early in the summer she was formally betrothed to Wm. Stanley, since April 1594 heir presumptive to the Earldom of Derby.

Such are the events which form the background of the *Lucrece*, and of the central section of the Sonnets, extending to § 73, if not later. The *Lucrece* parallelisms, numerous as they are, shed less light than those of *V.A.* on circumstances of date or personal relation. They include a few verbal echoes from the early Sonnets, but become frequent and prominent in Sonnets § 27-74, and in the companion Sonnets comprised in § 135-52.<sup>3</sup> Among the most striking are the heraldic parallels (St. ix) with § 12. 4 and § 37, the conflicts of passion (St. xcv) with § 146, and the structure of St. cxxxv-vi compared with § 66. Passages like § 55, '*unswept stone besmeared* with sluttish time' (l. 4) and 'to the ending doom' (l. 12), or again § 69, 12 'to thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds', and 'where late the sweet birds sang' § 73. 4, show how freshly *Lucrece* cadences and phrases lingered in remembrance. But after that point they begin to die away. As the Sonnets proceed (up to § 70)<sup>4</sup> the accents of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> In his incomplete list of forty-four parallelisms, Fort assigns the majority to these sections.

<sup>4</sup> See on § 61, 67, 69, p. 117.

warning or reproach become more frequent and specific; while at times the notes of wistfulness, and fear of estrangement, predominate (§ 83-5, 87-90). If, with imperfect data, closer precision may be hazarded, the main group § 27-73 may occupy summer of 1594, and § 75-96 be referred to the autumn following. This brings us within hail of Son. § 104, a controlling landmark, which combines precision with poetic charm.<sup>1</sup>

Three winters cold  
Have from the forest shook three summers' pride;  
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd  
In process of the seasons have I seen;  
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,  
Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green.

The reckoning is exact; writing in winter, he recalls three Aprils passing into summer, and summer in its turn thrice to the falling of the leaf. A sonnet written earlier than November or December 1595, or again later than the following March 1596, would throw the reckoning out; in the former case by excluding the 'third winter cold', in the latter by adding a fourth April to the remembered three. The *Venus and Adonis* fixes the first April for us in 1593, so that the date here reached lies between December 1595 and March 1596. Reckoning back from this December—March terminus, we gain a secure date for the preceding Sonnets § 100-103. In theme and manner they lead up to § 104, and § 102 must refer to the late summer of 1595. Between them and § 98-9, an

<sup>1</sup> On this see J. A. Fort's careful study in *A Time Scheme for Shakespeare's Sonnets*. To all who accept the chronological ordering of the Sonnets, and the Southampton destination, his argument, so far as it is carried, is irresistible.

interval of silence has elapsed—occupied it seems with other forms of composition.

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long  
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Return, forgetful Muse. . . .

Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey  
If time have any wrinkle graven there § 100. 1-2, 5. 9-10.

The spring of § 98-9, so clearly marked by

The forward violet thus did I chide,

caption <sup>1</sup> of § 99, must be the spring of 1595, and Sonnets § 87-96 will belong to the immediately preceding months, thus neatly knitting with our earlier calculations which assigned this group of Sonnets to that date. The resultant time-scheme may be tabulated thus—

Son. § 1-17—round April, 1593.

Son. § 18-32—summer to autumn, 1593.

Son. § 33-42 (+ § 133 and others)—latter 1593 (or early 1594).

Son. § 43-73—spring and summer, 1594.

Son. § 75-96—late 1594 to early 1595.

Son. § 98-9—early 1595.

Son. § 100-103—late summer, 1595.

Son. § 104—December 1595-February 1596.

How do these dates comport with the Oxford-Southampton ascriptions? The answer is clear and reassuring.

<sup>1</sup> It is strange that editors, one after another, against all evidence of scansion, treat this as a supernumerary line. It is a mere title-heading, to explain 'Sweet thief,' etc., and show that it is not a term of personal address.



With the earlier groups—the design of marriage in § 1-17 and its abandonment in § 33-42—we have already dealt at full length: on gaining freedom of action in 1594, Southampton, through vanity and wantonness—not unlike the Oxford of young days—began to dissipate and wreck the funded capital, with which birth and royal favour and gifts of mind and body had so amply endowed him, and to prepare the way for subsequent disaster. This period synchronises with that assigned to Son. § 43-73. By September 1594 (if not earlier) he was at Titchfield, preparing for the celebrations of his coming of age on October 6. On the eve of the event all plans were rudely interrupted by the Danvers' imbroglio, in which he became disastrously entangled. His participation in their escape from justice compelled him in self-defence to return to London, and shield himself under the ægis of Sir Thos. Heneage, whom earlier in the year his mother had espoused. During these agitations, which lasted through November 1594 to the end of January 1595, the period covered by Son. § 75-96, he was within close touch of the Earl of Oxford; and the tone of this section<sup>1</sup> of the Sonnets is just what the circumstances might lead us to expect.

Nor, for what they are worth, are literary corroborations lacking. At the Gray's Inn Revels of December 28, *The Comedy of Errors* was staged: and in this Play the closest verbal parallels 'starve for a look' in II. i. 88, 'thy dear self's better part' in II. 2. 127, and 'this body consecrate to thee' in II. ii. 136, find place in Sonnets § 75 and § 74. In *Mids. N. Dream*, which the most

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. XI, pp. 151-4.

approved authorities [see Chambers, *Shakesp.* I. 358-9] associate with the nuptials of Lady Elizabeth de Vere on January 26, 1595, Sonnet parallels are extremely numerous (exceeded only by *L.L.L.* and *Rom. 7.*), and direct reference to it is not unlikely in

Could make me any summer's story tell      § 98. 7.

Sonnets § 75—86 (apart from the incidental § 77, accompanying perhaps a Christmas or New Year's gift) turn mainly upon the rival, whose poetry in scale and elevation threatened to supplant his own hold upon the friend's appreciation. With Chapman in view, the references apply naturally to the *Hero and Leander* and *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, or perhaps even more to the projected version of the *Iliad* (issued in 1598), for which Chapman sought to enlist the patronage of Southampton.

We have thus reached the point, spring of 1595, to which *independent lines of reasoning* referred the composition of Son. § 98-9. And the time-scheme tallies with the course of events in a way that seems to debar mere coincidence. And this is still more the case, as we proceed. Just at this juncture Southampton definitely broke away from Court or Cecil ties, and 'hitched his wagon' to the star of Essex, as the rift opened between the caution of the Cecils and the ambitious schemes of Essex himself. In 1595 Essex had secured for his cousin Elizabeth Vernon a place as Maid of Honour, and Court circles commented on 'too much familiarity' between her and Southampton. Later in the year he definitely withdrew from Court, and thenceforward all his recorded activities—the projected

relief of Calais, the Cadiz expedition in 1596, the 'Islands Voyage' in 1597, the residence in France (1598), service in Ireland and the Low Countries (1599-1600)—connect him with Essex enterprises and adventures. In February 1601 he was committed to the Tower, under sentence of death, for participation in the treasonable plots which brought Essex to the block.

Most certainly these years were no time for the interchange of Sonnets of friendship, and prepare us for the gap which intervenes between Son. § 104 (December 1595—March 1596) and Son. § 107. All who allow that 'the mortal moon's eclipse' signifies the passing of the great Queen in March 1603, must admit the existence of some such break. The only question is Where should it be placed? For answer, the interior evidence of date falls into perfect step with the demands of history. The course of events from 1595 to 1603 precludes the maintenance of intimate relations between the Earl of Oxford and Southampton. They were out of touch, and in opposite camps; in 1601 Oxford, it will be remembered, was premier peer upon the High Court which passed the capital sentence upon Southampton. The intermission of Sonnets between April 1596 to April 1603 confirms our reading of the Sonnets, and their chronological coherence.

In conclusion, it may be added that literary parallelisms strongly, if not almost decisively, support this placing of the gaps. Whereas, in the main body of the Sonnets (§ 1-104) the parallels are found in the Poems and early Plays, in the closing Section (§ 107-26) the telling parallels occur almost without exception in later plays such as *Hamlet*,

*Troilus and Cressida*, *King Lear*. On Son. § 105, 106 I have nothing to add to previous comment,<sup>1</sup> but the connexion of § 106 with the completed *Faerie Queene* points clearly to 1596 as the date of composition.

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Rendall, pp. 244-5; see further, p. 260.

## CHAPTER XIII—SONNETS § 107-126

DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH: ACCESSION OF KING JAMES  
—RELEASE OF SOUTHAMPTON: RESUMPTION OF FRIEND-  
SHIP—LAST PHASES AND FINALE

WITH Sonnet § 107 then we pass to a changed setting—to the death of the great Queen, the release of Southampton, the resumption of the broken ties of friendship. That this is the true reading of the Sonnet—notwithstanding some critical vagaries—seems incontestable. The words speak for themselves—

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul  
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,  
Can yet the lease of my true love control,  
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.  
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,  
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;  
Uncertainties now crown themselves assur'd,  
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.

Nowhere could a more masterly rendering of contemporary history be found.

Thus absolutely introduced, 'the *mortal* moon' must designate a person; and, as Tucker says with perfect justice, 'the one practically certain reference is to Queen Elizabeth.' Since Raleigh's Poem, so often and so much admired by Spenser,<sup>1</sup> *Cynthia* had become the poetic

<sup>1</sup> For references see *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*, and also

appellation for the Virgin Queen, and is so used by Lyly and Ben Jonson in their Masques, by Davidson, by Barnes and others in their Odes and Sonnets. 'Eclipse' for death is an accepted Elizabethan use, employed by Shakespeare himself (1 *Henry VI*, iv. 5, 53); and certainly in

Alack! our terrene moon is now eclipsed

*Ant. Cleop.* III. 13. 153.

there is no note of temporary or merely passing obscuration, even if on occasion the word assumes a secondary value in suggesting a no less radiant life in store. 'The sad Augurs' (l. 6) are the prophets of evil, who had predicted confusion and disaster as the inevitable sequel of the Queen's death, whose gloomy presages had been so signally belied by the event. To Elizabeth's last breath the 'incertainties' which beset the succession to the throne had disquieted men's hearts in vain, until all conflicts were composed in the 'assured' union of the Crowns of England and Scotland in the person of King James. At his accession men's hopes centred above all in that title, by which he himself set most store, of *Rex Pacificus*—the peace-maker—who in his own realm had successfully

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the Book III Prelude, the Sonnet, and the Introductory Letter, appended to *The Faerie Queene*. It is perhaps worth noting how directly Wotton's masterpiece

You meaner beauties of the night

seems to draw on Shakespearean reminiscence. The opening line is inspired by *Lucr.* 13

Where mortal stars as bright as heaven's beauties,  
and the 'Philomel' figure, and 'early violets', which follow, read like transcriptions of Sonnet § 102 and § 99.

appeased the quarrels of turbulent chieftains and sectarian partisans, who had maintained friendly relations with the Queen of England and the monarchs of France and Spain, and whose first stroke of foreign policy was to negotiate a treaty terminating the chronic state of war between Spain and England. The 'olives of endless age' are echoed in Gervase Markham's tribute to 'the incomparable King—entering not with an olive branch in his hand, but with a whole Forest of *Olives* round about him'; and there could be no more telling authentication of the lines than that prefixed by 'the Translators' to the Authorised Version of our English Bible. 'Whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well unto our Sion, that upon the setting of that bright *Occidental Star*, Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory . . . the appearance of Your Majesty, as of the Sun in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists, and gave unto all that were well affected exceeding cause of comfort . . . accompanied with peace and tranquility at home and abroad.'

Moreover, not only is every phrase employed conclusively apposite to the occasion, but no tolerable alternative has been proposed. The one plausible substitute, the treaty of Vervins in 1598, will not bear examination: <sup>1</sup> little noticed by historians, and still less by poets, it was a mortifying reverse of Elizabeth's Continental policy, which she deeply resented and deplored: so far from inaugurating 'olives of endless age,' it left England at single-handed war with Spain; nor was peace finally signed till

<sup>1</sup> Advocated by Fleay and Gollancz. S. Butler's Spanish Armada hypothesis is not worth discussing.

August 1604, after the death of Elizabeth. For Southampton, personally, it foreclosed all immediate hopes of political or military activities, and left him with no better prospect than an aimless Continental tour.

With these clues, all that seems enigmatic in the opening lines becomes easy to unravel. 'The lease of my true love' means the unimpeded tenure and enjoyment of restored friendship with Southampton; 'control' is the legal term for restrictive conditions imposed upon the right of user: while for the position of Southampton, interned under sentence of death contingent upon the royal assent, what phrase could be more apt and terse than 'supposed (sc. regarded, looked upon) as *forfeit to a confined doom*.' Doubts may still attach to the precise meaning of the opening words; but they admit the simple interpretation—neither my own apprehensions, nor the forecasts and anticipations of others regarding your eventual fate, can any longer interfere with the claims of personal affection. The lines were written at the opening of April

Now with the drops of this most balmy time  
My love looks fresh

in confident expectation of the mandate for release, signed by James at Holyrood on April 5, but not yet actually delivered, though Southampton was already receiving the visits and congratulations of friends and supporters. Among them all, none can have been more welcome or dignified than this resumption of the severed links of friendship.

The rather precious vocabulary of the concluding



lines detracts somewhat from their allusive and literary charm

Now with the drops of this most balmy time  
My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,  
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,  
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes :  
And thou in this shalt find thy monument,  
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

§ 107. 9-14.

In the second line 'my love' must be read as abstract, not personal; and 'my love looks fresh' (used as in § 104. 8) carries on the April simile, the springtide of reawakening love. The menace of Death is past, the fount of inspiration can flow afresh, defying his usurping vaunts, and restricting his boasted sway to the dim Sheol in which there is 'no device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,' or to the *νεκρῶν ἀμύνηνα κάρηνα*—the frustrate shades to whom Hades denies the power of speech and utterance. The lines are—perhaps designedly—a revised version of the song of expectation in § 18, 12-13

Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

And in offering his felicitations, the Earl of Oxford could hardly have refrained from some such censure, as is implied by the 'tyrants' crests' of the closing line. It refers to the repeated and vindictive slights with which Elizabeth had persistently checked and penalised the young Earl's ambitions; the last phases of the Queen's embittered and capricious vanity made her death a welcome relief, even to those who to the last served her loyally. Shakespeare, it will be remembered, was one of those who

declined to add his tributary wreath to the flowers of adulation showered upon her grave; and it is perhaps needless to add a reminder, that this Sonnet, like others, was not composed for broadcast circulation.

### SONNET § 108

When Southampton emerged from the Tower, visibly affected in health and looks by the two years of close confinement, his friend's first endeavour is to assure him that no scars of time or trial can deface for him the ideal image of his youthful bloom.

Eternal love in love's fresh case  
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,  
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,  
But makes antiquity for aye his page. § 108. 9-12.

In the use of religious formulas—'thou mine, I thine' and 'Hallowed thy fair name'—to convey the assurance of unabated warmth in the affections, the note is somewhat strained. But there is nothing inappropriate in the phrase 'Sweet boy' (*l.* 5). It is used by Greene to Nashe at the age of twenty-five; by Falstaff to King Henry after his accession; by King James to Buckingham, when he had reached thirty.<sup>1</sup> It is intended to recall the past: and something of the kind was needed to propitiate the susceptibilities, of which Southampton made no secret. Vain, querulous and self-absorbed, he measured his merits by his miseries; and, as aggrieved and injured martyr, pursued his old associates, as well as the King himself, with appeals for redress of wrongs, and restitution of the belongings, forfeited by his attainder. Delays or difficulties he

<sup>1</sup> Southampton was not yet thirty.

imputed to their insincerity, or want of zeal. This is the background of these later sonnets, discernible in § 108, 109, 116, 117, 119, 120, 124 and elsewhere; and one cannot but admire the generous courtesy, with which the writer humours his friend's distrusts and discontents.

### SONNET § 109—LAST PHASE

With § 109 we enter upon the most vexed and tangled lap of our whole investigation. Praises are showered upon individual lines or sonnets, above all on § 116,<sup>1</sup> but on questions of date and origin and destination guidance fails, and the voices of exponents become bewildering and dissonant. Following the lead of Lamb—Tyler, Wyndham and others assumed that Sonnet § 110 dealt with humiliations and rebuffs experienced by Shakespeare as actor and playwright: Beeching points out how this flies in the face of all known facts, and, still more, how incompatible it is with a sonnet addressed to his stage-patron. He even goes the length of denying any reference to play-acting, and refers the terms used in § 110 and § 111 to social slurs or stigmas. With some qualification, Bradley and Tucker follow suit. Robertson, after his wont, goes further, and from the side of the recipient is positive that, unless at wide intervals of time and circumstance, they cannot be addressed to an individual friend or patron; he regards the whole group § 107-17 (if group they be) as addressed, by a too-fickle lover to some woman, or women—though in his judgment the terms used preclude reference either to the Dark Lady of the later series, or to the neglected wife at Stratford! and is even disposed to fall

<sup>1</sup> *e.g.* Saintsbury awards it the highest place of all.

back, in places, on Massey's theory of commissioned sonnets, composed on Southampton's behalf to Elizabeth Vernon (or another). Amid this welter of doubts and guesses we must not be dismayed. Such differences are not surprising in these later Sonnets. Poetic gift survives, but works under hampering conditions. The tone has changed: thought and feeling move under compunctions and reserves, which call for guarded and generalised expression. Apart from what has gone before, and from some guiding clues to setting and to context, no divination can feel confident of its results. Yet these *disiecta membra*—helps and warnings—are a challenge to endeavour, and new doors of approach may open to new keys of understanding; and the Oxford-Southampton attribution yields a more coherent and satisfying scheme of interpretation than any proposed, and indeed floods with light phrases and feelings, which hitherto have read like 'sound and fury, signifying nothing.' Like the alteration in looks referred to in § 108, so too the terms employed in § 109 point to a long and estranging break between § 107 and the preceding sonnets. The 'absence'—of prolonged severance and silence—denoted in *l.* 2, was much more than 'an unhappy affair,' or a lovers' quarrel: it involved an alienation, that looked like permanent breach of faith and withdrawal of affections; and the writer admits that there had been colourable grounds for such misgivings.

If I have ranged,  
Like him that travels, I return again  
Just to the time, not with the time exchanged,  
So that myself bring water for my stain.      § 109. 5-8.

The 'water' is the tears of repentance, which accompany

contrition and regrets.<sup>1</sup> They had trodden diverging paths, which precluded even the show of friendship. It is a true account of the relations between Oxford and Southampton during the Essex adventures, with their climax in the trial and the imprisonment (1597-1603). Time had brought its revenges and its lessons, and now held out the invitation to renew the old and tried affections, '*Just to the time*'—prompt, that is, and punctual to the stroke of opportunity. He on his side is ready to admit 'blenches' and aberrations in the past; asks only that bygones should be bygones; for any faults or defaults of weakness or of temper,

All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood § 109. 10.  
he is ready to give satisfaction to the full, and the pledge of unreserved devotion to all calls and offices of friendship, as a claim entitled to precedence above all others,

For nothing this wide universe I call  
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all. § 109. 13-14.

The terms sound extravagant, and Robertson would refer them to the passion of a wooer; but he overlooks two points. First, throughout the Sonnets (perhaps with good reason),<sup>2</sup> the 'Rose' metaphor is applied invariably to the male friend; and secondly, the warmth of phrase in no way exceeds that of the next sonnet

Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,  
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast § 110. 13-14.

where the introductory

an older friend,  
A god in love, to whom I am confined § 110. 11-12.

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<sup>1</sup> Admissions of the same kind recur § 117, 118, 119, 120, and there is no reason to think them groundless. <sup>2</sup> See p. 145 n.

is hopelessly inappropriate as an appeal to a slighted mistress.

### SONNET § 110

Sonnet § 110, which in its turn leads to § 111 and the following, is retrospective and apologetic—the author's answer to personal complaints and reproaches, with which his friend assailed him. I cannot here dissect details of verbal exegesis,<sup>1</sup> though phrase after phrase deserves careful study as comment and self-criticism upon the violence of motive and demeanour—the melodramatic strain—characteristic of the later Tragedies. The opening lines have been the crux of commentators:—

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
Made old offences of affections new.

There is no need to thrust upon them the bald literalism of provincial tours, or of cap and bells upon a public stage; but it needs special pleading to divest 'motley' of associations with the stage, though it is well to remember that the most distinctive use of the term in Shakespeare<sup>2</sup> connects it not with any capering Fool, but with the disillusioned nobleman, the 'melancholy' Jaques, whose humours—whimsical or cynical—are the reaction induced by surfeit on the pomps and vanities of courtier life, through which he attained the chartered liberty

To blow on whom I please . . . and through and through  
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,  
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

*A.Y.L.I.* II. vii. 59 61.

<sup>1</sup> See G. H. Rendall, pp. 255-60.

<sup>2</sup> 'All the world's a stage.'

Obscuring clouds gather about the closing years (1596-1604) of the Earl of Oxford's life, but if indeed they were devoted to the composition of the great Dramas that complete the Shakespearean Canon, they must have numbered among their experiences 'the spurns of patient merit,' 'the pangs of dispriz'd love,' 'the whips and scorns of contumely,' the defeats of hope, the bitterness of social ostracism, and the travails of self-esteem, which went to the creation of the jaundiced pride of Coriolanus, the savage isolation of Timon, and the mad miscarriages of Lear. The objections which Beeching feels fatal in the case of the successful actor and playwright, disappear when applied to the Earl of Oxford as dramatist. 'Gor'd my own thoughts' is a phrase, a simile transferred to the lips of Achilles in the *Troilus and Cressida*,<sup>1</sup> voicing poignantly the mood which, chained to the post of public indignities, defies to the death the snarls and onslaughts of malicious assailants. The iron had entered into his soul; gall, such as it needed 'potions of eisel' to eject (§ 111. 5. 10 and cf. § 119. 1), as he winced under the insults and praises

Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;  
For what care I who calls me well or ill? § 112. 2-3.

and later,

My adder's sense  
To critic and to flatterer stopped are § 112. 10-11.

shows with what sensitive endurance he had quivered under the lash. He too had felt the cravings for reassuring sympathy.

Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,  
Even that, your pity, is enough to cure me. § 111. 13-14.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tr. Cres.* III. 3. 229.

But this is by no means the end of the story. The Sonnets themselves are an assurance, that the overtures for reconciliation bore good fruit, that suspicions and misunderstandings were gradually healed, and that mutual trust was re-established on the sure footing of ancient friendship.

O benefit of ill ! now I find true  
That better is by evil still made better,  
And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,  
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.  
§ 119. 9-12.

And further, that the writer's own tone and outlook gain a new sense of security and hopefulness, based on restored position and respect.

These readings are not in themselves conclusive, but gain welcome confirmation from testimonies, derived from either side, which shed clear light on a complex situation, and even help to date successive sonnets. On the death of Queen Elizabeth, one of the first acts of the new monarch was to sign an order for the release of Southampton. It was received at the Tower and took effect on April 10, the month to which § 107 may be confidently assigned. With the least possible delay, Southampton hurried northwards to meet the Royal cavalcade, which had reached Huntingdon on its progress towards the capital. Surrounded by greedy claimants, Scotch and English, for places, privileges and preferments, the King received him with marks of high distinction, commissioning him to bear the sword of State, though for the time being he reserved the restoration of titles, or restitution of his forfeited estates. Without these he was destitute, and in dire need of every influence that could secure or hasten



their recovery. None probably were of greater importance than those wielded by Robt. Cecil and the Earl of Oxford, to whom it had fallen to inflict the penalties and forfeits of attainder. To Southampton, brooding in long confinement, the original infliction, and still more the ruthless and prolonged detention, were proofs of personal hostility, and the sonnets of reconciliation could only take the form of apology for seeming wrongs, of pleas for forgiveness, and of assurances of unwavering constancy in the affections (§ 117. 14). It needed soothing balms and flatteries to disperse the clouds of jealous and vindictive petulance<sup>1</sup> with which Southampton nursed his grievances and pressed for instant redress. But as reparation after reparation was secured—the royal grant of pardon, the Order of the Garter, the Stewardship of the Isle of Wight—the Sonnets indicate improved response, and the removal of distrust; and in § 116 the crescendo of restored affections finds expression in lines second to none in dignity of thought and movement:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediments. Love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds,  
 Or bends with the remover to remove :  
 O no ! it is an ever-fixed mark  
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken ;  
 It is the star to every wandering bark,  
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle's compass come ;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.      § 116. 1-12.

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<sup>1</sup> *e.g.* with Lord Grey, Sir W. Raleigh, and others.

In this renewal of troth after the interval of estrangement, the sonnet shows striking resemblances to the letter written by Oxford to Sir Robert Cecil a month after the death of Queen Elizabeth. 'In this common shipwreck mine is above all the rest, who least regarded though often comforted of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the alterations of time and chance, either without sail whereby to take the advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm be overpast.'

And a kindred literary parallelism deserves incidental notice. The arresting 'ever-fixèd mark' echoes the fine imagery of *Cor.* V. iii. 74-5

Like a great sea-mark standing every flaw  
And saving those that eye thee,

and again the simile from baleful and remedial drugs in § 118 is strongly reminiscent of the Menenius apologue, and of the kindred simile in *Cor.* I. i. 183-5:

Your affections are  
A sick man's appetite, who desires most that  
Which would increase his evil.

Once more 'Prosperity be thy page' in *Cor.* I. v. 23<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is nothing to fix the date of *Coriolanus*, but these close parallels are strongly suggestive of a date not far removed from that of these later sonnets. This single specimen of Sonnet parallelisms illustrates a fruitful field of comparative research. Mr. Fort (not working on Oxfordian lines) has tabulated the most arresting parallels throughout the whole series of plays, a task making severe demands on industry, and scholarly acumen; but it yields results of no little value for checking or confirming accepted dates of order and composition. Full exposition of results would need a volume to itself; but they point conclusively to affinities between successive strata of the Sonnets

closely echoes

‘Makes antiquity thy page’

in § 108. 12; while in *Cor.* V. iii. 40

Like a dull actor now | I have forgot my part

is a replica of the earlier Son. § 23.

Amid the clash of rival claimants, feuds and factions, which attended the birth of the new regime, it is futile to guess at the particular intrigues and humours, which occasioned the several sonnets. In point of time and general background, Sonnets § 116-25 group together, and even in the latest the Coronation ceremonies of June 25 are still fresh in mind. They reflect, as is only natural, the restless recriminations and distrusting with which Southampton urged his pleas for satisfaction, and the generous allowance with which Oxford remained loyal to the old ties of friendship. In § 117-22 he stands upon the defensive; and while the terms of emotion are not without rhetorical vehemence and effect, explanation and

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and companion groups of Plays, earlier or later. The early Sonnets abound in echoes from the *Two Gent. Verona*, *Love's Lab. Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Rom. J.*, while in the later Sonnets the striking parallels are with *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Cymbeline*—a valuable corroboration of the maintenance of time-order in the Sonnets as they stand. Our sonnet § 116, composed a little later, reflects the more or less complete rehabilitation of Southampton's fortune and estate, associated with the Coronation ceremonies of the Feast of St. James (July 25). By that time he had been nominated Captain of the Isle of Wight, and reinvested with the Earldom, and in August he received the valuable grant of the Sweet Wine Import Duties, which Essex had forfeited by escheat. Possibly this adds a touch of fitness to the maritime similes of § 116-17.

apology do not lend themselves to poetic glow, and expression as in § 119-21 becomes uneasy and forced. They refer to incidents connected with the past, but that is no good ground for transposition, and there is little attractive or convincing in the alternative contexts or interpretations proposed.

Sonnets § 123 and 124 pursue the theme of § 116—constancy in the affections—on the text ‘Love’s not Time’s fool,’ which is re-echoed at the close of § 124. In the last line

This I do vow, and this shall ever be;  
I *will be true*, despite thy scythe and thee.

he probably plays on the proud *Vero Nil Verius* of the De Veres.<sup>1</sup>

#### SONNET § 124

Sonnet § 124 is a much finer sonnet than has usually been recognised. It applies the text of the foregoing to the vicissitudes of public life—in which ‘policy’ and ‘politic,’ it must be remembered, are more nearly concerned with Court cabals than with the shifting currents of ‘Time’s love’ or ‘Time’s hate’ set in motion by popular opinion. ‘Dear love’ builds upon surer bases<sup>2</sup> than those on which their sentences of promotion, or of disinheritance, depend. It is not affected, for better or worse, by these outward marks of distinction; nor, on the

<sup>1</sup> For instances, see § 21. 9, 62. 6, 82. 11-12, 125. 13. Cf. pp. 144-5, and ‘Truer than truth itself’ on the lips of Don Armado, *L.L.L.* IV. i. 63.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Builded’ (*l.* 5, and cf. *l.* 11) connects our sonnet with ‘Pyramids built up’ of the preceding, and ‘great bases’ of the following sonnet.

other hand, does it surrender to the reverses and the shocks which wrecked so many careers in those troublous days of political unrest;

No, it was builded far from accident ;  
It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls  
Under the blow of thrallèd discontent,  
Whereto the inviting time our fashion calls.

These, and the lines that follow, need some comment for guidance through the jungle of divergent explanations, which have connected them with French or Spanish complications, with Catholic conspiracies of Throgmorton, Babington, or Mary Queen of Scots, with the downfall of Essex, or with the Jesuit intrigues and the Gunpowder Plot. With none of these had Wm. Shakspeare any personal concern; but upon the Oxford-Southampton basis all becomes clear and apposite. The 'smiling pomp' refers to the fortunes of successive favourites, so characteristic of the Elizabethan regime, as pictured in Son. § 25; the 'blow of thrallèd discontent' is a sympathetic reference to the disgrace and imprisonment of Southampton; but may also glance at the condition of Lord Grey, Brooke, Raleigh and others, whose fortunes had experienced such reversals of award under the 'leases of short-numbered hours,' upon which their tenure of authority was held. Contrasted with such captious judgments is set the 'hugely politic' outlook; the phrase is not altogether neat or happy, but it connotes the fuller knowledge and broader sympathies of tried affections, entitling them to stand

as towers of strength  
Four-square to all the winds that blow,

regardless of the fluctuations of heat or drought, sunshine or shower, to which so many careers have been unjustly sacrificed. The terms are purposely kept general; but among the 'fools of time' Essex, as one conspicuous example, is certainly included. These brief notes will, I hope, help to clarify the purport of the closing sextet.

It (dear love) fears not policy, that heretic,  
Which works on leases of short-number'd hours,  
But all alone stands hugely politic,  
That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with showers.  
To this I witness call the fools of time,  
Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

The sonnet shows how indispensable personal background may become for just literary values and appreciation. In his defence of general application, Tucker's full commentary lacks nothing in exegetic skill and insight, but at the end the reader is driven to ask *What, whom, had the writer in mind? and what is it all about?* With a few minor adaptations almost every word converges naturally upon Southampton.

The opening words of the last Sonnet

Were't aught to me I bore the canopy

set their seal of authorship on the whole series. The phrase is too concrete and personal to be merely figurative, nor has any such employment been adduced. The canopy was used on rare occasions when Royal pageants assumed a ritual dress, as at the Coronation, a National Thanksgiving, or at the induction of the Monarch into the University Cathedral at Oxford. At the Thanksgiving for the overthrow of the Armada (1588) and again at the Coronation ceremonies on July 25, 1603, by virtue of rank

and office the Earl of Oxford took his place among the Bearers. The mark of titular distinction was fresh in the minds of both, the aptest illustration he could have chosen for his theme, and 'extern' is similarly used in *Othello* I. i. 63 of purely ceremonial marks of honour. The

great bases for eternity,  
Which proves more short than waste or ruining § 125. 2-3

revert to the similitude of the 'pyramids'

The pyramids built up with newer night § 123. 2.

and glance at the ephemeral rewards and posts of eminence, which lie at the mercy of accidents of wealth or mis-carriages of fortune. Favours, as experience had taught both him and his friend, may be bought too dear; in the lavish desire to please, too often

Vaulting ambition o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other (Macb. I. vii. 27.)

Have I not seen dwellers on form or favour  
Lose all and more, by paying too much rent,  
For compound sweet forgoing simple savour,  
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent?

Be our meat and drink the simple fare of home-brewed mutual affections, richer and surer in return than the more luxurious sweets which decorate royal tables. So, with something of unconscious presentiment, he reverts to the language of religion with which the sonnet opened, as for the last time he brings to the altar of friendship that heart's oblation, with which none other can compare—

No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,  
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,  
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art  
But mutual render, only me for thee.

Let no baseless insinuations of malicious tongues dare to impugn the self-evidencing power of truth.

Hence, thou suborn'd informer ! a true soul  
When most impeached stands least in thy control.

It is as fine an ending as could be wished for an attachment which, at least upon the writer's side, had been so rich in generous expectations, and, after all, of enduring constancy. The parting of the ways had come. On August 9 Southampton was appointed to the Council of the Queen, and his days were preoccupied with the reception of the Venetian ambassadors, with the Royal Proclamation of Peace with Spain, and, when the Court broke up, with his Island Stewardship and the reconstruction of his ancestral estates. For the Earl of Oxford, the Coronation was the last State function in which he took part; there remained but a few months, or weeks, before 'the Sergeant's fell arrest' (§ 74) announced 'the audit,' which 'though delay'd, answered must be' by all (§ 126). Prescient of the approaching end, he closed the book, with a last word of warning and of hope committing his record of companioned hearts to the

Eyes not yet created, and the tongues-to-be,  
which shall 'oer-read' the tale that is told

When all the breathers of *this* world are dead. § 81. 10-12.

The final number (§ 126) is not a member of the Series; it is not indeed a sonnet at all, but a twelve-lined canzonet written in rhyming couplets. Neither is it addressed to the recipient of the rest. 'My lovely boy' has no concern with age, nor amorous attraction; it denotes the



‘lyric love’—the Prince in ballad convention—to whom the Sonnets owed their inception. Transposition, as proposed by Douglas, Denys Bray, and others, wrecks the retrospective values of the whole. As it stands, it confirms the preservation of the original order of writing. It is the author’s *Envoi* to a finished work, his moving *Explicit* to the volume, which now he feels has reached its close.

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power  
 Dost hold Time’s fickle glass, his tickle<sup>1</sup> hour;  
 Who hast by waning grown, and therein show’st  
 Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow’st;  
 If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,  
 As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,  
 She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill  
 May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.  
 Yet, fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!  
 She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure:  
 Her audit, though delay’d, answer’d must be,  
 And her quietus is to render thee.

Lovers must decay and pass, leaving the loved one to pursue his destinies and realise his opportunities. Though Nature’s rarest gifts may for their season postpone and defy the wear and tear of Time, yet be it remembered that even Nature’s most favoured darling must soon or late submit himself to the last audit of the inevitable end.

It is the covering wrapper, so to say, to the most intimate experiences and self-expression of the author’s self—appended, probably by his own hand, to the completed packet (or Album) in which the Sonnets were put by.

<sup>1</sup> Q. reads ‘sickle’. On the text consult Tucker and Knox Pooler. In l. 4 it is hard to choose between lovers (Q.) and lover’s.

## CHAPTER XIV—SONNETS § 127-54. CONCLUSION.

### SONNETS SERIES B—A MEDLEY. UNITY OF AUTHORSHIP: PUBLICATION AND DESTINATION

IN the printed Quarto, the insertion of parenthetic brackets may indicate a break between the main sequence (§ 1-126) and the supplementary Sonnets appended § 127-54, but most likely merely denotes the supposed shortage of two lines in § 126. But the contrast of characteristics in the two series is very marked.

In the main series there is unity of destination; all are addressed to a man, and under constantly varying vicissitudes; coherences of time-scheme, allusions, literary parallelisms, and personal relationships, combine to prove that the original order has been preserved. In the appended sonnets, some are addressed to women, some are introspective soliloquies, some mere exercises or trivialities in verse. Son. § 127 plays on the familiar theme of black beauty compared with fair,<sup>1</sup> brunette with blonde; and is so similar to Biron's effusions in *L.L.L.* IV. iii. 250 *v.* and other passages, as to suggest that it was composed for dramatic use; but the pursuance of the same theme in § 131, 132 tells in favour of a personal reference, though hardly to the 'dark lady' of the subsequent sonnets.

<sup>1</sup> Discussed by Tucker, *Introd.* liii-lvi, as well as in *Commentary*.

Sonnet § 128 is a pleasant gallantry to some fair accompanist, skilled with the virginal; the phrasing closely resembles that of Son. § 8, and suggests more or less contemporaneous authorship. With Son. § 130 as humorous banter of an individual or a class, we have already dealt on Son. § 21, pp. 87-9.

At the further end Son. § 145 and § 153-4 (with their local quips) are puerilities, never intended for print, though verbal parallels seem to favour their claim to authenticity: while Son. § 129, and in less degree § 141 and 146, 147, are introspective soliloquies, so tense and intimate in self-disclosure that they must have been written for emotional relief rather than for perusal by others.

The inclusion of § 138 and § 144 (in slightly amended form <sup>1</sup>) in Jaggard's 1599 anthology, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, associates them with the earlier *Venus and Adonis* and *Love's Labour's Lost* section of the Sonnets, and this is corroborated by the close verbal parallels which § 144 shows with *Lucrece*, l. 85

This earthly saint adorèd by this devil,

and similar language in *Lucr.* 1513-19.

For present purposes Son. § 147-52 may be disregarded as flat, feeble or tasteless productions, probably put on one side (together with § 153-4) as worthless. They contribute nothing of value for determination of date or occasion; nor should any author be taken to task for jottings not intended for other eyes.

After these deductions there remains a central nucleus

<sup>1</sup> On the variations see Tucker, p. xiv, and G. H. Rendall, p. 285.

of sonnets (roughly § 133-44) concerned with the 'dark lady' episode, though it is a mistake to regard them as dominating the whole, or even as a series addressed to the mistress concerned. They are not in strict chronological order, for the 'Suspect I may' of § 144. 10 must precede the open admission of amorous relations in § 133, 134 and others. Some of them (such as § 141, 144) are introspective, and clearly unsuited for despatch either to the lady, or to the favoured rival. Sonnet-writers are always under the temptation to exploit their own sensations for practice in their art. But that they are based upon the unpleasing episode of Son. § 33-42 is perfectly clear: the situation is the same, unparalleled in Sonnet literature, and the verbal links are decisive, as a single Sonnet is enough to show

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan  
 For that deep wound it gives my friend and me!  
 Is't not enough to torture me alone,  
 But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be?  
 Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,  
 And my next self thou harder hast engross'd: § 133. 1-6.

where 'engrossed' is the market term for 'buying up,' 'monopolising.'<sup>1</sup>

The latter half of the sonnet elaborates the tasteless sophistication of identification with his friend, as copartner in the receipt of favours dispensed.

These appended Sonnets add little or nothing in the way of personal clues, but in combination shed helpful

<sup>1</sup> The verbal parallelisms have been already discussed in Chap. VI, p. 106.

light on problems of preservation and publication. A collection so miscellaneous in kind, and value, and destination, could only have existed in the author's keeping—preserved possibly in an album, more probably in detached sheets, clipped or strung together. Such as they are, no third person could have collected them—and there is good reason for opining that some never passed out of the writer's own hands. Further, there has been little, if any, readjustment of the order in which they were preserved—except possibly in the more fugitive and occasional Sonnets at the end. In the main series, no editor could have had the wit or dexterity to produce a sequence showing coherent plot and development of personal relations, delicate links connecting inter-related sonnets, and a synchronised harmony in literary parallelisms with unpublished Poems and Plays. Had there been rearrangement, he would certainly have incorporated the relevant Sonnets § 133-44 with those relating to the same episode in the main Series, § 33-42. And again, within the main Series, he would assuredly have combined the references to a rival poet or poets, which at present seem faithfully to preserve the order and intervals of composition.

What is the natural—the almost inevitable inference to which these considerations lead? The Sonnets were a private preserve, treasured by the author, yet demonstrably—as the misreadings and misprints of the Quarto show—not published by his authority, or under his supervision. And to this it may be added that the recipient of the main series (be he who he may) even if he preserved material so compromising, would never have given his consent to open—and still less to private—circulation. In a word,

publication must have been posthumous, or pirated, or both.

This brings us to the vexed problems of actual publication, with which we must deal in the most concise terms possible. The Sonnets were published in 1609, five years after the death of Lord Oxford, at a date when Wm. Shakspeare had taken up his residence at Stratford, and retired from any professional connexion with the stage. They were prefaced by an enigmatic dedication to a 'Mr. W. H.,' signed by T. T., that is, Thomas Thorpe, of Hackney, who had previously published (among other volumes) Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and *Lucan*, Bk. I. Through what channels these had passed into his possession is not known; but it was a branch of the trade in which Thorpe specialised, and his interest lay largely in contemporary dramatic productions, *e.g.* by Chapman, Ben Jonson, and others. Among the agents with whom this line of activity brought him into touch was one William Hall, who already in 1606 had brought out a volume *The Fourefold Meditation* under the W. H. initials, and later became responsible for other anonymous publications.

One after another, the attempts to identify the mysterious 'Mr. W. H.' with Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, with Wm. Herbert Earl of Pembroke, or later with Wm. Harvey, the family friend and adviser, to whom in 1599 the Dowager Countess of Southampton gave her hand in marriage, proved untenable. An alternative suggestion was advanced by Sir Sidney Lee, that 'the onlie begetter of these Sonnets' referred not to the

source of inspiration, but to the procurer of the manuscript, from which they were derived: and in support of this he called attention to the 'W. H.' initials prefixed to *The Fourefold Meditation*, and to the trade connexions subsisting between Wm. Hall and Thomas Thorpe. Wm. Hall was a somewhat obscure publisher, who specialised in the acquisition of anonymous manuscripts, mostly theological, to which he gave unauthorised publicity. '*A Fourefold Meditation* conveyed by a meere accident to my hands,' and printed in 1606 by G. Eld, was the first of such ventures; he introduced it with a dedicatory foreword by W. H., and from 1608 onwards published miscellaneous treatises under his own name. Its production may be regarded as typical: plausibly ascribed to Southwell, the Jesuit, it proves to have been the work of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel—a cousin of the Earl of Oxford—during his imprisonment in the Tower. But in face of the actual wording of the Dedication 'To the onlie Begetter,' the absence of support in literary usage, and the weight of tradition, Lee's suggestion that W. H. the publisher could be the 'Mr. W. H.' of the Sonnets met with little favour. It was destined, however, to receive dramatic vindication from the researches of Col. Ward among contemporary Records and Parish Registers. On the small scale, they may be compared with the enterprise of Schliemann, who with pick and trowel advanced upon the mounds of Hissarlik, routed the fallacies of experts, and put to confusion the dogmas and disquisitions of the erudite. His successful identification of Wm. Hall, the publisher, and his sensational discovery, that in August 1608, in Hackney Parish

Church, he was 'joyned in matrymonye with Margery Gryffyn,' are among the romances of literary exploration; and the stages and details of the quest<sup>1</sup> will carry conviction to all but the stiff-necked, that Thorpe's dedication is an acknowledgment of his friend's good offices in procuring for him the manuscript of the Sonnets. It is (as indeed Mrs. Stopes had ventured to surmise) a felicitation on his marriage, and a forecast of 'the eternity promised by our ever-living poet,' in the prospect of offspring, perpetuating his image 'refigured . . . in posterity' (§ 6. 10-12).

On this showing, date and place become of signal importance. In 1609, King's Place, the Earl of Oxford's Hackney residence, passed into the possession of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. And the same year saw a certain recrudescence, or aftermath, in the output of Shakespearean, or quasi-Shakespearean, literature. Not only the Sonnets, accompanied by a *Lover's Complaint*, but also *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Pericles* are associated with this period. And it is not unreasonable to infer a connexion between the two facts. What happened to the deceased Earl's papers, or into whose custody they passed, is not yet established: there must have been deliberate and very careful suppression. But as regards the Sonnets, with which alone we are here concerned, the train of events seems clear. The 1609 edition was pirated, with the help of Wm. Hall. At this period there was little or no conscience in such matters: the unauthorised use of manuscript material—whether in the field of drama, poetry, pamphleteering, or homiletics—was habitual,

<sup>1</sup> Fully recounted in Ward, *The Mystery of Mr. W. H.*



almost a branch of the publishing business. Neither at the time nor later does any hint, direct or indirect, of claim or disclaimer, connect them with Wm. Shakspeare of Stratford. And the facts contradict it. Authorised publication of material so compromising could only have been to enhance reputation, or to make money; and neither end was served; nor did he even secure intelligent production of the text. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that he submitted tamely to unauthorised misappropriation of his name or handiwork.

On the assumption of Oxfordian authorship, the difficulties are reduced to a minimum. Alike at his death, in June 1604, and later at the final break-up of his Hackney home, in 1608, an impenetrable veil, probably by his own desire, was drawn over all records and doings of his latter years. He left no will, no known directions for the settlement of his estate or the custody of his effects: no monument or inscription marked the unpretentious grave. His books and papers remained presumably in the keeping of his wife; but some few, it would appear, perhaps those entrusted to some private receptacle (such as that poetised in Son. § 48), found their way into other hands. By what chance of oversight or of connivance the Sonnets came into the possession of Wm. Hall, there is no knowing: but Thos. Thorpe was quick to seize the opportunity, and put them into print, with a screening dedication and with lax and hasty supervision of the text. The family and those nearly concerned were quick to take alarm, and to suppress a volume so rich in material for Court gossip and malicious scandal. Not only in respect for wishes of the deceased, and on personal grounds, but even more

in the interests of his son and heir, the 18th Earl, the Dowager Countess would leave no stone unturned. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter,<sup>1</sup> was married to the Earl of Derby, whose active connexion with literature and the stage secured commanding influence in those circles: while the younger daughter<sup>1</sup> Susan became wife to Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, one of the 'incomparable pair of brothers,' to whom the First Folio edition of the Plays was officially dedicated. Upon the other side, the Earl of Southampton himself was no less intimately concerned in the suppression of a volume, which contained so much of compromising matter. To the combination of these influences it is probably due that so few copies of the Sonnets found their way into circulation, that they were accorded no place in the edition of the Plays in 1623, and that they virtually disappeared, until resuscitated in the garbled and mutilated version produced by J. Benson in 1640.

With the summer of 1603 the Sonnets reach their natural—their inevitable—close. The Earl of Oxford's health had long been shaken and precarious, and within a few months, without recorded sign, on June 24, 1604, he passed to his rest. He was buried without pomp or monument in the parish church at Hackney, and the veil cast over his last days and dispositions has remained impenetrable. The Sonnets, possibly in some measure expurgated, are the most intimate clue to personality.

<sup>1</sup> They may well have been the 'grand possessors' referred to in the Preface to *Troilus*. See Ward, *Mystery of Mr. W. H.*, p. 44.

Regarded as the work of Wm. Shakspeare, Actor and tradesman of Stratford, they become a medley rich in samples of poetic charm and finished workmanship, of ingenious conceits, of feigned humours and dramatised emotions. But—as volumes like those of Massey, Robertson, Forrest testify to superfluity<sup>1</sup>—they remain baffling and incoherent, irreconcilable with the position of client and patron, out of keeping, and again and again incompatible, with anything known of the antecedents, doings or career of Wm. Shakspeare, or his relations with contemporaries. Such unity as they possess is stylistic only, not vital or psychological. No manipulation of contents, no rearrangement of order, no inventions of impersonal contacts have yielded any consistent or passable elucidation of the setting, the surroundings, the social implications in which they move. But under guidance of the clue proposed, riddles and contradictions are resolved, allusions and assumptions fall into their natural place and bearings, gain new significance and appropriateness, and are fortified by unexpected corroborations from contemporary happenings and lines of evidence. An inner scheme and progress reveals itself, determined not by artificial laws of composition or creative invention, but by the natural reactions and vicissitudes of associated lives and fortunes. Details perforce remain obscure, but coherence of plot confirms unity of authorship and destination. The Sonnets are the poetic effluent of a chequered intimacy that extended over a long term of years, but whose utterances are almost

<sup>1</sup> To Robertson a full third, to Forrest about half of the Sonnets are non-Shakespearean.

entirely restricted to two periods 1593-6, and again to 1603, during which the Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Southampton were in familiar contact. And the close of the Sonnets, like that of the finished and authentic Plays, corresponds with that of the Earl of Oxford's life.

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